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Rhymes of Eld



Herbert Ferguson

67/49

* True. Wholly

Ferguson

NBI

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RHYMES OF ELD

BY
HERBERT FERGUSON

"There is a comic side from which to regard humanity
as well as a tragic one."

Matthew Arnold

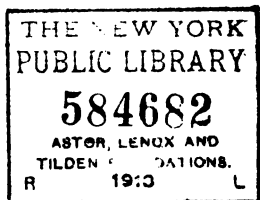


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WYKON
CEN
WAGA

OWAIN'S ADVENTURE

A ROMANTIC POEM WITH A SMILE IN IT

(From the Mabinogion)

Twang, Cymric harp strings, 'neath an alien
hand,

In praise of Owain, who let do a deed
That had no fellow in a Parlous Land!—

All in a vale it happed, a grassy mead,
Naked of shadow, save for one Great Tree,
That grew alone for lack of companee.

A relic of some old Druidic Wood,

Right strange and mystic was this Deep-
Loined Tree,

And like a Green-Cloaked Sentinel it stood

To mark a Little Kingdom's boundaree;
And in the Dog-Days, tired and travel-spent,
The Knight rid up, and halted 'neath its tent.

And he persaft a Fountain did spring up

Hard by, and that a Marble Slab was set
Close by the water, with a Chainèd Cup;

And since the sultry weather did beget
A raging thirst, he leapt from saddle-seat,
Dipped up the bubbly water, cool and sweet,

Swallowed a quantum to allay his drouth,
And emptied half-a-cupful on the stone.
And on the instant, East, West, North, and
South,
The black clouds gathered, by a great wind
blown:
The sheeted rain whipped off the Big Tree's
leaves,
And it did thunder to the tune "Green
Sleeves."¹

Never was such a storm since Noah's Ark
Struck bottom in the Port of Ararat.
Never did day in June-time wax so dark,
And never such a gale laid corn-rows flat.
But Owain turned his horse's crupper to it,
And cried, "Odd's Blood! I think that I'll live
through it!"

And so he did, for presently the sky
Resumed its true complexion,—a mild blue.
The Day-star burned with doubled brilliancy,
The birds returned (a thrush, a finch or
two),—
Forgot the fright they twittered out at first,
And sang as if their very throats would burst.

¹ "Let the sky rain potatoes, let it thunder to the tune
of Green Sleeves." Shakspeer.

While Owain wrung the wet out, and gave ear
To the glad music of the feathered choir,
He heard a sound of one approaching near,
And then a voice: "O Knight of strange
attire,

What evil have I ever done to thee,
That thou should'st wreak the ruin that I see?

"Dost thou not wit this deadly storm hath
slain

All unhoused living creatures in its path?"
And lo, a Knight pricked on across the plain,
On whose unvisor'd face there sate great
wrath.

Black was the tabard o'er his armor thrown,—
Jet-black the barb he rid o'er stock and stone.

"I never dreamed," the Cambrian warrior said,
"That spilling out a gill or two of water
Would call a cloud-burst down from overhead,
Much less a hail-storm that would work a
slaughter

Of all the live stock forty miles around,
Including lost dogs in the common pound.

"But since you charge it to me, let it pass.
And if a fight is what you're looking for,
Here is a field soft-carpeted with grass,
And fitted every way for knightly war.
Have at you, then,—and woe betide the day
On which you dared a Welshman to the fray!"

Then did they lay their lances in the rest,
Spurred on, and brake the ashen staves in
twain:

Then drew their glaives, and battled breast to
breast

Till Owain smote the Black Knight to the
brain:

Whereon he turned his barb and swiftly fled
To homewards, knowing he was three parts
dead.

Him speeding after, Owain did descry

A most resplendent Castle, high and vast,
With arrogant turrets thrusting at the sky,
And a great moated wall about it cast.
Upon the central tower a tall staff stood,
From which a banner flaunted, red as blood.

The bridge fell, and the Black Knight cantered
in:

But lo, the great portcullis was let fall
Just as the Cambrian to the gate did win:
Just in the midway, on each hand the wall.
It sliced the steed off two feet from his tail,
But only grazed bold Owain's coat of mail.

It even snipped the rowels off each heel,
So close it shaved him as it thundered down,
For it was footed with great teeth of steel.
So there he stuck, still barred from out the
town,
Betwixt the outer and the inner gate:
And he became The Knight Disconsolate.

“Alas,” cried Owain, “and alack-a-day!
I molt the plumage of my knightlihead.
I had the vantage in the crimson fray,
But now I’m corked up, and my steed is dead.
This witless ride is like to cost me dear:
For who in thunder could get out of here?”

But through a chink-hole in the gate he saw
A long street, with fair dwellings on each
side,
And in the street a lass extremely braw,
With yellow ringlets, and a frontlet wide
Of beaten gold upon her stately head;
Saffron her robe, her shoon of Turkey red.

And so it happed that this sweet vision came
Close to the inner gate, and stayed her pace,
(Close to the gate in her strange robe of
flame,

With her so-angel-looking, rose-tinged
face,)

And would have passed without, but, sooth to
say,

The Warder of the Port had fled away.

"Open," cried she, and "Open," yet again,
But no one heard her, save the Cambrian
Knight.

"Lady," quoth he, "it gives me muckle pain
To know that (cribbed and bolted in here
tight)

I neither can unbar this gate to you,
Nor you to me, to let us both pass through!"

Then told he her his place and knightly name,
And she made answer: "It is passing sad,
Yea, by Our Lady, 'tis a bitter shame
That thou art trapped here like a river
shad!

Nathless, I'll do for thee all that I can:
For why? I know thou art a Ladies' Man.

“Upon thy finger press this broad gold ring,
But turn the stone inside thy hardy palm,
And clasp the stone, with fingers tightening,
And bide here till the hour of evenpsalm:
And just so long as thou conceal'st the stone,
It will conceal thy shape from everyone.

“When they come forth to fetch thee, full of
wrath,
To choking death upon the gallows-tree,
Their trampling feet shall tread a foolish path,
And not a murderous eye thy form shall see.
Meanwhile, by yonder horse-block will I wait
Till such time as thou comest through the
gate.

“With natural vision me thou shalt behold,
But thou to me wilt be as empty air.
So, clasping still the virtuous ring of gold,
My shoulder touch what time thou comest
there;
And whatsoever way I turn, go thou,
For by the Saints thy safety I do vow.”

Whereon the Lady, so beringleted
With living gold, went lightly on her way.—
And Owain did at all points as she said;
And when the Burghers came to fetch their
prey,
Trapped like a weasel, lo, it was not there:
Or rather, it was vanished into air.

But there the front half of the dead steed lay,
Lopped off abaft the saddle, slick and clean;
And while they wondered, Owain stole away,
And saw the Maid by whom he was not seen,
Let touch her snowy shoulder with his hand,
And did not fail to follow her command:

To-weet, to pace behind her noiselessly.
Swiftly they went, and at the last they twain
Came to a door that was divine to see:
Of bronze it seemed, and twice as large again
As any church door. Yard-long were its
hinges:
Gold, argosied in carracks from the Injies.

Nathless it opened to the Lady's hand
As it had been of cardboard, and showed
forth
An high-ceiled chamber: spacious both and
grand:
So rich no Hebrew might cast up its worth.
The nails were silver, all the pegs were painted,
The panels, pictures. Owain almost fainted

To see such glory, for it put to shame
The rude magnificence of Arthur's Court,
Where gold and silver set the walls on flame
Half in a palace, half within a fort.
Then, having made ablutions in a dish,
He dined on manchet-bread and white-bream
fish.

And truly, he did feast egregiously,
Though it's a secret what the warrior drank.
Of wine there is no mention made, pardie,
Nor golden mead, much used by men of
rank;
And though it must have gravelled him to bear
it,
Belike cold water was his table-claret.

Howe'er it be, he heard a curious droning
Within the building as he sate at meat:
Most dismal sounds. "The Prelates are in-
toning,"

Spake up the Maid; "the Holy Men, ye
weet,
Are giving Unction to the Nobleman
Who owes this house, and shrive him as they
can."

"Pray God their caterwauling does some
good,"

Quoth Owain. "Sudden Death would be a
boon.

I wit no instrument of brass or wood

Designed to thus assassinate a tune.
Give me, in lieu of your Gregorian Groans,
The honest music of the Tongs and Bones."

About the hour when hospitable smoke

Rises from hearths (the beadmen's even-
song),

She showed the Knight a four-post bed of oak,

Goodly for lodgers either short or long;
And he did off his weeds, and gat within,
And pulled the coverlet up to his chin.

And when the first light of the reddening East
Stole through his casement with awakening
power,
He heard strange wailing,—not th' intoning
Priest,
But woman's heart-break in her bitter hour;
And starting up, with one leg out of bed,
“'Tis pounds to pence,” quoth he, “the good-
man's dead!”

Then, with his cotton night-cap on his head,
He thrust the window up for better vision.
His fair protectress, bouncing from *her* bed,
Came in her shift, unweeting of misprision,
And side by side they looked down on the
show,—
The Mortuary Drama staged below.

For such it seemed, this burial of the Duke,
Or Count, or Baron, whatsoe'er his style.
First came the Mayor, in a huge peruke.
Behind him the procession stretched a mile:
From wall to wall the broad street it did fill,
And all the host was armed with staff or bill.

The Marshals, clad in gold and black, bore
maces,

And there were horsemen in their battle-
gear;

Cross-bowmen marched abreast, with sad-
dened faces,

And here and there a tanned cheek showed
a tear;

Knights carried gold and purple bannerolles,
And Churchmen chaunted in their solemn stoles.

A veil of white above the Bier was spread,
Of choicest linen, worked with flowers-de-
luce,

And burning tapers flickered 'round the dead,
According to the Holy Church's use;
And those that strode beside the funeral couch
Might every one a Baron's rank avouch.

And by the Bier, in midst of the press,
A lovely Lady wept. Nor coif nor snood
Bound up her many a yellow-streaming tress,
And there were red bedabblements of blood
On her white shoulders, and her robe was
torn,—
And over all her bitter cries were borne.

And, night-capped in the casement as he was,
Owain was smit as with a thunderbolt,—
Love-smit, and sighed out many Oh's and Ah's,
And said, "Now tell me, if ye be no dolt,
What that Gold-Headed Loveliness may be,
That wails so loud, and looks so wretchedlee."

"My Mistress," quoth the Maiden: "who but
she?"

"Then, by my soul, I love her," quoth the
Knight.

"Most fair, most liberal, famed for chastity,
Well mote she find all favour in thy sight:
Nor dost thou need to fear the least delay
Because thou kill'dst her husband yesterday!"

So spake his window-mate. And thereupon
They clean forgot the pageant and the rites:
The stole-clad priests, to churchwards march-
ing on,

The *Miserere*, the quenched altar-lights,
The green turf heaped upon the Dead Knight's
breast,
And *Requiescat* for his better rest.

And they twain feasted,—wickedly enough,
 Since on their foreheads they had had the
 chrism,—
And on a Friday ate a deal of stuff
 That was forbidden by the Catechism:
And Owain's she-Achates the next day
Called on the Countess,—some three doors
 away.

Its triple windows dark, with bolted door,
 Like a stone mourner stood the Great
 Chateau.
Withinside women's voices did deplore:
 Red eyes were there, and bosoms stuffed with
 woe.
And so, when Lunéd bowed (that was her
 name),
She scarce was noticed by the widowed dame.

Again she dropped a curtsy, low enough
 To suit the most punctilious lady breathing:
The Countess answered nothing, smooth or
 rough.
 For why? The Crater of Her Grief was
 seething.
At last she said, "How changed are all thy
 ways!
Thou did'st not come to see me these two days."

"Now, truly," Lunéd answered, "I supposed
Thy good sense better than I find it is.
Still weeping: and the Book of Fate is closed!
Thou mourn'st him: is he not in bale or bliss?
Will sorrow bring him back, or give thee aught
That seems a good possession in thy thought?"

"I do declare to Heaven," the Countess said,
"He had no equal in the world, not one."
"Not so," quoth Lunéd; "as against the dead,
The living them in value quite outrun.
As to thy husband, now it seemeth me
The ugliest man were better far than he."

"Wretch," stormed the Countess, "I declare to
God
That had I heart to punish one I reared,
I'd hand thee over to the beadle's rod:
Yea, by the common headsman have thee
sheared
Close to the shoulders. May shame light on
thee:
To some town-crier's wench comparing me!

"I banish thee forever. Get thee gone!"
"Glad am I," quoth the Lady, "that thou
hast
No better reason than that I had done
Thee highest service. But that time is past.
It nothing boots that I should take such pains.
Who ever said that Countesses had brains?"

Doorwards she grandly swept, like one who
wears

On chrism'd temples a gold diadem:
But lo, the Countess followed to the stairs.

Then lightly did she cough, *Ahem, ahem:*
As who should say, "I stand on what I said,
But I, at least, can make you turn your head."

And turn her head she did, and then 'gan say,
"Evil betide which of us twain shall seek
For reconciliation from this day."

"I know that thou art like a fresh-pulled
leek,
Best while unbitten," quoth the Countess,—
"still,
Come back,—and give me counsel,—if you
will."

And there was Peace on Earth, as when of old
The Choring Angels, hovering in the sky,
To listening shepherds touched their harps of
gold,

And ravished them with Heavenly Melody.
And having both suppressed their agitation,
The Ladies had a famous conversation.

"See," quoth fair Lunéd, "how thy Kingdom
lies,—

Exposed to foes without and fools within:
No one to boldly ward its boundaries,

And stop the storms that drench us to the
skin;
For while the Tree stands and the Fountain
flows,
Domestic Knights with foreign must change
blows.

"And none except a Knight of Arthur's Court
Can do this service. Bid me go and seek,
And ill betide me if I not report
A Martial Paragon inside a week."
Whereon the Countess said, "Go thou, I pray."
And Lunéd went,—three doors or so away.

And she abode at home such time as might
Have ticked off while she rid an ambling
steed
To Britainward, and told all to the Knight.
Then, doing on her back her richest weed,
She sought the Countess: "I am come at last:
And surely, Arthur's realm is not so vast.

"But for his Knights, they are the pick of all,
The perfect flower and crown of Chivalree.
In lady's bower, at table, or in hall,
In field or turney, they bear off the gree;
And I have chosen one who towers above
The whole Round Table, both in War and
Love."

Well pleased, the Countess said, "Fetch him to-morrow."

So Lunéd made the proper preparations,—
A coat, a surcoat, which she had to borrow,
(In both' some parti-colored variations),—
A gold-embroidered mantle, and high shoes
With lion-clasps, as Knights in Britain use.

And Owain stood tofore her where she sate,
Upon a dais withal, a Scotch ell high,
With halberdiers about her in great state;
And she regarded him with steadfast eye,
And said, "No travel-stains defile his weeds."
"Nay, Lady, he was carried by swift steeds,"

Quoth Lunéd, joyfullest when lying most.
"There's something makes me think," the
Countess said,
"None other than yon stranger chased the
ghost
From my Lord's body."—"Peace be with the
dead!
If this Knight thy dear liege in battle slew,
It proves he was the mightier of the two.

"Prize him accordingly." And Owain stood,
pardie,
Speechless, a-dangling of his knightly hands,
Like a stone-mason at a quilting-bee.

“Well,” quoth the Countess, “these are my
commands:
Lodge thou and feed this Knight a day or two,
And I’ll consider what I ought to do.”

That self-same eve, when Love’s Consenting
Star
Smiled in the West, and a great Golden
Moon

Checkered her chamber-floor with many a bar
Of tremulous light, and every rose of June
Exhaled its soul to make the night more sweet,
The Countess, sitting in her stocking-feet,

Murmured: “We widows can’t be choosers,—
no!

The Begging Friar, when he fares abroad,
Accepts the broken meats the burghers throw
Into his wallet, and gives thanks to God;
And, like the humble churchman, I must say
Laus Deo when a husband comes my way.

“I can not call him clerkly, for I doubt
If this stark Knight can spell upon a book;
But might and manliness gird him about,
As wild thyme clothes a bank beside a brook.
His legs are comely, and of proper length,
And like two oak-trees in their pillared
strength.

“ ’Tis true he’s rather hulking when he walks,
And nothing like Laodamas for grace.²
His wit, God knows, is wanting when he talks,
And bristles, thick as gorse, o’ergrow his
face;
But if his lip were shaven,—with that done,
His kiss might be endured by any one!”

The morrow day the bells were let to ring,
And stretched their brazen throats beyond
the wall,
As if to say, “This is a Public Thing:
Attend, Good People, at the City Hall.”
And so they did, first putting on their best:
Likewise the Countess, in white samit drest.

The Ushers of the White and Golden Rods
Thumped everybody into proper place,
Though Commoners sustained the hardest
prods.

Then every glance was bent upon Her
Grace,
Who, standing up with rather shaky knees,
Plunged, like the Trojan, into *medias res*.

² The light-footed son of King Alcinous. *Odyssey*,
Bk. IX.

And lo, she said, the Big Tears in her eyes,
 “My Earldom lies defenseless. There must
 be
Some Able Knight to ward its boundaries,
 And help me in my Hard Extremittee.
SOME ONE OF YOU MUST WED ME, OUT OF HAND,
OR BID ME SEEK A SPOUSE IN BRITAIN LAND!”

But, young and old, the Burghers seemed de-
 prest,
 And sate there like a tongue-tied companee,
Till one piped out, grown bolder than the rest,
 “The Lord knows we don’t want you! Nay,
 not *we!*”
The Countess flushed, but answered with a
 smile,
“I wit a Man who thinks me worth his while.

“Mighty in battle is he; comely, too:
 Nor do I doubt that he will keep the Foun-
 tain,
And in the blood of Knights his blade imbrue,
 Though they stand higher than the Hermit’s
 Mountain.
It e’en may hap that he will master *me!*”—
And all the People said, “Amen! Praise
 Be!”

Areade ye well, there was a great to-do
In making ready for that Marriage-Rite:
Baking and brewing, and a Barbecue
Of whose dimensions I'm afeared to write:
Gold Mead in puncheons, Red Wine by the tun,
And bread thrown in,—enough for every one.

The Bishops and Archbishops said the Mass,
The Accolyths swung censers up and down,
The Bridal Pair to altarwards did pass,
And it was holiday in all the Town.
So was she bedded with the Chief of Men,
The Cambrian Knight, Owain ap Urien!

And Owain kept the Fountain mightily,
And stretched out Knights upon their bloody
biers
For spilling water 'neath the Mystic Tree,
And this did he for full three hardy years.—
And now, pardie, I cease to garner chaff.
Read the Welsh Relics for the other half.

* * * * *

Is there a Moral to this Story? Aye.
Hear it, ye Husbands of a Doting Day.
*To balk their marriage when your time is past,
Take your wives with you when you breathe
your last!*

THE OLD CHOIR

THE sexton nods beside the stairs:

Before his desk the priest I see,
Who, just as usual, draws the prayers.

Each face is where it used to be
Before the years had stretched so wide:

The organist beside his keys,
The tenor, Tom, hard by his side,
The alto, with her violet eyes,
The sweet soprano, with her girlish face,
And I, who "lead the choir," and sing the bass.

The lips of June have kissed the year,
And in the loft I wait to hear

A footfall break the calm.

In mellowed splendor through the panes
The deepening twilight's purple stains

The air and spot embalm:
So hushed and mystic, yet intense,
Imagined sweetness fills the sense
As of a just-concluded psalm.

And now the death of day is knolled:
Flicker the organ's pipes of gold,

And as the purple light grows thin,
My fingers, self-instructed, drop
Upon the clarabella-stop,
And loose the angel voice within.

And still the shadows grow more gray:
Still further fades the world away,
But as I search the ivory keys,
And weave the dream-born harmonies,
The creaking stair I know so well
With note discordant breaks the spell,
And there she stands, with flower-like face,—
The nymph of all my hopes and fears,
The maiden with the shell-like ears,
And the Madonna's pensive grace!

Oh, not for poets do young moons
Sail silver barks through purple seas:
For souls of lovers are these Junes,
These endless leafy ecstasies:
This balmy night, through whose warm dusk,
Half tropic with the rose's musk,
With passionate feet we wander far,
Unheeding how, above the wood,
The Cluck Hen leads her golden brood ¹
Around the fixed, white star.

And now to-day,—red-letter day
For hearts on which we dote,—
Flowers make the chancel strangely gay,
And Tom has got one on his coat.
The alto wears a bridal-veil:

¹ The seven stars of the Great Dipper, anciently known in England as "The Cluck Hen and Chickens."

In her dark hair the rose so pale
Is not more fair than she.
Tom leads her to the altar-rail,
And all the town is there to see!

Oh, magic key that Memory bears!
Yes, though I hope to be forgiven,
I've dropped my book, I've missed the prayers,
I've dreamed of Love instead of Heaven!

The sermon's done; and as he stands
Erect in priestly gown and bands,
Upon the people's bended heads
The parson with extended hands
The benediction spreads:
The postlude from the organ pours,
And folk are moving to the doors.

Listless, I wander up the street
To where the burial marbles gray
Have faced the rain and wintry sleet,—
I think 'tis twenty years to-day.
I see the briar-rose, blushing sweet,
I see the sprigs of caraway:

The warm air seems with life to thrill,
And every bird has time to trill
Its unpremeditated lay.
And must I hear the music still?
Ah, blue-eyed nymph, relapsed to clay,
Why did you sing my heart away?

How oft the marring planets bid
Our dawning joys dissolve in tears!
How many radiant hopes are hid
Behind the mists of twenty years!
Yet howsoe'er it pain my heart,
And nightly make my eyelids wet,
A tender sweetness soothes the smart,
Nor leaves me leisure to regret—
What I indeed would not forget—
That e'er I saw that girlish face,
Or lead that ancient choir, and sung the bass.

O dearest Lord, Who rose again
To shame the doubting Sadducee,
What futile tears our eyes would rain
But for the hope we build on Thee!
And since my faith is that on high
The Mother of the Downcast Eye
Looks on the lips that drank her breast,
And sometimes talks with Christ about
The poverty that thrust them out,
And made a shed their place of rest,—

I keep this memory, dear to me,
And dream that sometime I shall see
 The Lady of the Sapphire Eyes,
Who left me for a brighter clime
Beyond this bank and shoal of time,
 And joined the Choir of Paradise!

“THE LAST SUPPER”

It angered the prior, Fra Lippi,—the man of
the masterful face,
Who governed the rope-girdled monks of the
convent of Mary of Grace,—¹
That the painter Da Vinci, the famed Leo-
nardo, day after day
Should sit with hands folded, and idle the mo-
ments away
Before the great picture designed to adorn the
refectory wall,—
Christ's breaking of bread with The Twelve,
ere He tasted the gall
Of that wicked betrayal.—Genius and patient-
est labor had won,
And the beautiful, marvellous painting, except
a few touches, was done.
Nothing was wanting to give the grand sub-
ject artistic accord
But to fittingly image the features and head
of the Lord,
And the visage of Judas the traitor. But
now, as the lark in his flight,
Too daringly climbing the zenith, descends
from the crystalline height,

¹ The convent of Madonna delle Grazie, in Milan.

Or as the tense string on a dulcimer snaps with
the stress
Of the ravishing music it passions and throbs
to express,
So the great painter, despondent, and weary
of finger and brain,
Sadly acknowledged that starry endeavor is
wedded to pain:
That to seize airy Fancy, and bind her, is vain
as to set
One's self to imprison the soul of the rose in a
butterfly-net.

For this was the problem: to limn an im-
mortal-terrestrial face,
To marry to feminine tenderness masculine
grace:
Leonine quietude, veiling the amorous heart of
the dove,
Pity, and beauty, and sorrow, and majesty
mingled with love.
Given this task, and the power to achieve it so
critics should say,
"This is the true *Deus-Homo*," or, "This is
the masterful way,"
Another task challenged his pencil: to fashion
the face of the man
Who, jingling the crimson blood-money, could
smilingly plan

The death of his friend and his Saviour.—
Only two faces to paint!
But though there were wretches in Milan, and
many an aureoled saint
On chapel and gallery wall, or on beautiful-
traceried pane,
They furnished no model from which the great
artist might gain
The hint to his liking. Hence, daily more
crushed with despair,
Facing the incomplete picture, the painter still
sat in his chair,—
Longing with passionate spirit to merit an
unbestowed grace,
Striving to win a swift glimpse of the beauti-
ful, tranquil Christ-face,
By deep meditation and holy outpouring of
heart.
But the striving was fruitless. The task
seemed too large for the limits of Art,
And the vision seraphic which might have re-
warded his prayer
Was denied to the artist, whose mournful, pre-
occupied air
Was the jest of the convent. Each day as he
passed the refectory door,
Noiselessly sliding with slipper-shod foot o'er
the travertine floor,
The cowed brother smiled, and, with scornful,
fat finger applied to his head,

Uttered in pantomime all that the lips of the
sneerers had said:

“This Da Vinci is only a dauber; this trumpeted
‘prince of his craft’

Can’t fill in two heads and two faces! The
painter has surely gone daft.”

For this was the thought of the Prior, who
said to the painter one day,

When he sat with despair in his looks, and the
brushes were all laid away,

“They tell me your hands can break horse-
shoes, though duchesses’ hands are less
white.

Why, then, do you sit with them foolishly
folded from morning till night?

Is labor distasteful? Beside you are brushes
of Syrian hair,

And the tubes of rich colors, all ready to
squeeze,—are they not lying there

By your palette and maul-stick? Before you,
awaiting the finishing-touch,

Is that talked-about, never-done Supper, on
which you have wasted so much

Of your time, or, more truly, the time of the
excellent Duke of Milan,

Whose quarterly scudi you pocket, but quite
on a reprobate plan,

Since payment supposes some service. I rate
you exactly as he

Who snatches a purse on the highway, not
mincing my words, as you see.
Besides, 'tis the service of God, and of Mary,
and Mary's sweet Son,
Which you shirk here, sir artist! So, lay on
the paint, and have done."

"Fra Fillipino," the wroth artist answered,
"your trade is with beads,
And the Body of God in the mystical wafer,
which twitches and bleeds
If carelessly dropped at the altar. You pat-
ter your prayers day and night,—
Your finger-worn rosary, keeping the crucifix
always in sight.
You celebrate mass in your chasuble, gorgeous
with gold,—
Which the linen-clad priest of the bells and
pomegranates would gasp to behold.
The smoke of rich gums is around you, and
worshippers fall on the knee
As you mutter your snatches of Latin. You
hark to the penitent's plea,
And, sitting in judgment, you pardon the
venial sin,
Or haply prescribe the flagellum, which raises
blue welts on the skin.
But what do you know of that Master whose
life was all pity and love?

Or of what you call *Spiritus Sanctus*, once
seen in the form of a dove?
I would that you knew it, Fra Lippi, the
draughtsman's miraculous art,
And might crayon me swiftly a sketch of the
Christ that you bear in your heart,
Though I know very well, as I deem, what that
picture would be:
Some bony death's-head of a Cadi, offensively
just, whose decree
Crushes a culprit for running away with a
morsel of bread,
And evens the score with the lashes and gashes
that make his back red.
For me, though I write me a son of the Mili-
tant Church, yet I know
But little of God or of heaven, though much
of these shadows below;
And though I can counterfeit life on the can-
vas,—so much I have won,—
I shrink from the task of portraying the glori-
fied face of God's Son,
Unless I shall see it before me, the same as
I've seen a fair star
Leaning and passioning down in the night
from its blue window-bar.
That grace I aspire to. I sigh for it, burn
for it, seek it by prayer,
Nor ever will paint, till I see it, the Face that
has been my despair!"

The Prior's eyes snapped, and he rushed to
the Duke with a choleric complaint
Of the obstinate artist who waited a vision be-
fore he would paint:

"He's a laggard, a dawdler, a dreamer, accom-
plishing nothing at all!

What had he done, when you set him to splash
the refectory wall?"

"Why," quoth his Highness, a certain embar-
rassment marking his air,

"He had painted *Rotella del Fico*,² a labor ac-
counted most rare,

The Angel with Uplifted Arm, and a gracious
Madonna or two,

And Neptune Behind his Sea-Horses, with all
of the nereid crew

Attending him. Also a beautiful, curious
sketch, I believe,

For a tapestry-work, to be known as The
Story of Adam and Eve.

No doubt of his masterful genius, but, like the
green rennet, it needs

Time and the ripening sun to impart the brown
touch to the seeds."

² The Fig-tree Panel, a wonderful knot of writhing
serpents.

"Time and the ripening sun," sneered the
Prior: "that's all very well,
But tell me what cycles must pass ere the
cluster shall redden and swell?
Four times hath the fig brought its blossom to
fruitage, and yet I can see
Nothing but shrivelled and puckery crabs on
this niggardly tree.
It's too bad, for there's scarcely a cloister in
Italy, barring my own,
But boasts of some beautiful sculpture, some
martyr done grandly in stone,
Or altar-piece, lovely to see, where the Virgin
is pelted with flowers,
Which the wives of the peasants, with babes at
the breast, glue their eyes to for hours.
Must each *padre* who wears an old cassock, and
lights up a candle or two,
Brag of his frescoes, and none dip the brush
for a ruler like you?
The city has painters of sign-boards for tav-
erns, and surely your Grace
Might light on some botcher in colors to finish
a head and a face.
Pray, send for this dolt of a painter, and give
him his cue once for all:
To hasten the end of his daub on Our Lady's
conventual wall!"

So the bronze-bearded, grand Leonardo, still
seeking through heavenly grace
To rise to the height of portraying the Sav-
iour's majestic face,
Was bid to the palace, obeyed, and ascended
the chrysoprase stair;
Entered the presence, and waited, uncovered,
with reverent air,
While the sumptuous ruler of cities, as only a
great patron might,
Chid him for dreaming and praying, and
echoed the pale Prior's spite.
Then anger, or something akin to it, conquered
the diffident shyness,
And, a rose burning red on each cheek, the
painter replied to his Highness.

“As the Duke, you have chosen the mulberry-
tree for your crest, or device:
A pretty armorial riddle, but which I can read
in a trice.

The mulberry, loved for its leaf by the silk-
worm, for its flower by the bee,
Is a great, dendral wisdom: a sort of a Plato
in guise of a tree;
For it never puts forth till the winter is past
and the spiceries flow,
And the berry turns purple as soon as the
blossom has scattered its snow.
All which is to say, that the great Ludovico,
the Duke of Milan,

Thinks deeply, moves surely, and reaps the full
fruit of his rational plan.
If this be the key to your statecraft,—that
large and fine use of the brain,
Which strengthens the hands of a people,
builds, governs, and garners the grain
'Gainst the time when the desolate valleys shall
pine for the sound of the rain,—
Is it strange that the painter should ponder,
take forethought, and dwell in a dream,
Ere the cunning hand, laying the colors, ex-
presses the things that but seem?
Take the case of Iscariot the traitor. I've
ransacked the festering jails,
And肘ed the rabble on days when they
crowded the town's gibbet-rails,
Watching the red-handed wretches who clanked
on the way to their death,
To see if their brutal brows changed ere the
hangman had ended their breath,
Or the stolid-faced headsman, uplifting his
glittering axe in the air,
Sundered their necks like white parsnips, but
the thing that I sought was not there.
And so with the Lord, our dear Master.
Whenever I saw a rare face,
I plucked from my girdle my sketch-book, and
noted the strength or the grace;
But though I've sketched thousands, and many
a one with the brow and the port

Of the gods that are chiseled in marble, the
noblest came wofully short
Of the grand Galileean. I think, with Ber-
nardo, my good artist friend,
'Twere better to give up the striving, and call
the great work at an end:³
For where is the genius whose daring is equal
to painting God's Son?
But if Duke Ludovico opines that a master-
piece ought to be done
As a bricklayer throws up a rough-pointed
wall,—in one day, or two,—
Perhaps the Dominican prior Fra Lippi's thin
visage will do
For the portrait of Judas. Just utter the
word, and I'll fresco him in,
For, making the picture I aim at, 'twill punish
his sin,

³ Bernardo Zenale, of Treviso, who was working at the same time as Leonardo in the convent of Madonna delle Grazie. He advised Da Vinci to leave the head of the Christ unfinished, "as he could not hope to surpass what he had already done," and cited *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia* by Timanthes in justification of his opinion, i.e., where the artist having employed every possible expression of grief in the attendants, conceived he could not do more justice to the feelings of the father than by covering his face with his mantle, leaving the imagination of the beholder to do the rest.

His sin of meddling; for there he shall sit,
with the bag in his hand,—
The betrayer of Jesus,—as long as a stone of
the convent shall stand!”

Loud laughed Il Moro,⁴ his teeth through
his beard flashing ivory-white:
“If Lippi knew that, his prelatical bowels
would melt with affright.
Go back to the convent. Be lord of your leisure,
and take your own time.
I know that the Alps, with their ramparts of
crystal, are rugged to climb,
And partly I fathom your struggle to clamber
the sun-lighted spire,
The splendid but strenuous height of the artist’s
completed desire.
The Prior will seldom intrude, with his hungry,
ascetical face,
While you labor with palette and brush in the
convent of Mary of Grace.”

So, back to the cloister. But though there
was ferventest prayer on his lips,
The vision came not, and the soul of the artist
was dark with eclipse.

⁴Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan, surnamed Il Moro, not because he was dusky, like a Moor, as stated by Gibbon, but because he chose the *moro* or mulberry-tree for his coat of arms.

His hands were still folded, his bosom was sore
with the ache of despair,
And, facing the incomplete picture, the painter
still sat in his chair:
Sat till there burned on the traceried windows
(slim, pointed, and high,)
The flame of the roses and tulips that blossom
in Italy's sky:
Till the glorified west poured its opal and purple,
which fell everywhere,
And stained, as the murex stains wool, both the
yellowing walls and the air:
Till the wonderful pageant of color had
dwindled and melted away,
And the serecloth of twilight had covered the
face of the newly-slain day,
And at last the warm, odorous midsummer
darkness invaded the room,
Where only the sacristan's taper shone faint
like a star in the gloom.

But once, when the canticle known as the
Agnus was sung by the choir,
And the psalm, to the wail of the organ, rose
holier, richer, and higher,
The soul of the artist went with it. He
prayed, as he sank on his knee,
"Show me, O Lamb of God, show me the vision
I long so to see!

Not that my pride may be pampered, but all
the dominion be Thine,
Still on earth as in heaven. Oh, show forth
Thy servant a sign,
That those who were born out of time through
the work of his fingers may see
Some rays of the glory, the strength and the
weakness commingled in Thee!"

And even as when a rathe rose, closely shut
in the indistinct morn,
At the amorous kiss of the sun from the bud
to the blossom is born,
So the rose of his fancy expanded and blossomed
to garland his art,
And the vision that blest him rewarded the
perfect desire of his heart;
And he seized on the brushes and pencils, and
dipped in the colors, and lo,
The tranquil, grand face of the Saviour, which
all of the ages shall know!⁵

⁵ Of the Christ of "The Last Supper," before the picture was defaced by time and shot to pieces by the troops of the first French Republic, it was written that "his attitude is tranquil and majestic, and a kind of noble serenity appears to pervade his countenance and action, which increases respect." The engraving made from the painting by the Chevalier Raphael Morghen is supposed to preserve its main characteristics.

But stay. What of Judas? I tell you the
tale as Vasari hath told it,
And one or two verses, I deem, shall suffice to
unfold it.
He found the arch-traitor one day as he walked
in the streets of Milan,
And, having seen Christ, it was easy to picture
a reprobate man.
For the rest, save a portrait or two of light
ladies who sinned to please Kings,
His art was devoted to beautiful, holy, and
heavenly things,
Until, in the arms of the monarch, King
Francis, he gave back his breath
To the only authentical Artist, who fashioned
life first, and then death.⁶

⁶ Francis First, King of France, in whose arms
Leonardo died.

THE CADI AND THE CALIPH

THE splendid Abderahman (famed of yore) ¹
'Mong troops of guarded beauties loved but
one.

Zahra she had to name, a lovely Moor,
With cheeks red-ripe like fruit kissed by the
sun,
And the delicious breasts and starry eyes
Of the immortal Maids of Paradise.

To honor her this richest of all Kings
Built a white city, just a two-mile out
From thronged Cordova. Water from cool
springs

In crystal rivulets flowed all about,
And there were groves of oranges and limes,
And gardens sweet with blossoms from all
climes.

There those fair aliens of the feathery head,
The green and graceful palms, were set
a-row,
(Friends of the camel of the cushioned tread,)

¹ Abderahman Anasir Ledinallah, Defender of the Law
of God.

And felt the West Wind through their long
fronds blow:
Some in their hearts did wells of wine enfold,
And those that bare the date shed fruits of
gold.

Lovely the sight was where the terraces
Skirted the mountain that looked down on
all,
With many a grove of murmurous, deep-loined
trees,
Through which there gleamed full many a
waterfall:
Myrtle and jasmine spiced the balmy air,
And roses blushed or whitened everywhere.

But though the city seemed a pleasure-place,
'Twas poor beside the palace built to please
The young Sultana of the flower-like face;²
For there great architects from over seas
Mixed Grecian and Byzantine art in one,
And left a dream in marble when 'twas done.

² In the Arabic, Zahra means Flower or Ornament of
the World.

Rich and delicious, crowned with utter grace,
Yet one apartment, midmost of the pile,
Was richer still; and in that fairy place
The monarch basked him in his Zahra's
smile,
Sipped at the wine, and while Love ruled his
soul
Heard singing to the cittern and citole.

"The Chamber of the Caliph," so 'twas hight,
With many a silken hanging, deeply dyed,
Inwrought with verse Ben Ahnaf did indite;
Gold arabesqued the walls on every side,
And gemmy stars burned in the roof of blue,
Just as in Heaven the living lustres do.

Jasper and alabaster everywhere,
And florid columns soaring to dim heights:
Fountains that sprayed rose-essence on the air,
And jewels that emitted sparkling lights:
City of Love 'twas called, as scribes relate,
And Zahra's statue topped the outmost gate.

Happy the Caliph who could write his love
In such grand characters, and fortunate
The ruler who might see the peaceful dove
Bringing the olive to his palace-gate:
Albe at last he did but deeply sigh,
Deeming that glory was but vanity.

Glory and Love,—the playthings of the great,
Each in its turn discarded! For the sword
Wearies the arm that wields it, soon or late,
And wrinkles are the dower the years afford
To dazzling beauty. Hear this monarch, then,
Who reigned and loved beyond all other men.

“I have been Caliph now for fifty years.

Pleasure, and riches, honor,—these were
mine.

Kings feared or hated me, and some shed tears.

I had all God could give and man design;
And yet, when I recount what I have been,
The perfect days I knew *were just fourteen!*”

Ah, that rich sennight in the golden room:

The lips that passioned, and together clung
As bees cling to red blossoms: the perfume,

The purpling cup, the ditties that were
sung:

But what about the barren hopes, the fears
That marred the splendor of those fifty years?

So sumptuous Abderahman lived his life,

And there his son, El Hakim, crowned a
King,

In that same palace housed a lovesome wife.—

No doubt it seemed to him a little thing
That a poor woman, who abode hard by,
Should sell to him a field he thought to buy,

Since there he purposed, having gold to spare,
To build a rich pavilion. So straightway
A counsellor was sent, of reverend air,
With fluent tongue, and wagging beard of
gray,
To pay the new-struck dinars instantly,
And fetch him back the title in good fee.

But lo, the woman said, "What needs the King
With this poor relic of my better days?
If he should offer me his signet-ring,
With piles of gold heaped up on silver trays,
I would not sell it. Poor though I may be,
This field is heritage enough for me."

But the gray, crafty minister, too wise
To bring such answer back, bowed low and
said,
"Let me find favour in my master's eyes.
The deed is on the record duly spread,
And ere the morrow morning's mist is flown
The workmen's tools shall clink upon the
stone."

And certainly all happened as he said;
For, seizing with strong hand upon the field,
He left no roof above the wretch's head,
But brake the walls down which had been
her shield
'Gainst wind and weather; and, in no long
space,
White from the builders' hands, and breathing
grace,

The beautiful pavilion stood complete.—
With many a tear bedewing her dim eyes,
The poor old woman shuffled her tired feet
Cordova-wards, and told her miseries
To Bechir, a gray Cadi of the town,
Who for just judgment bore a just renown.

"Go, for the present,"—so he made reply,—
"And meanwhile wholly leave this thing to
me.

If I have any wit, I deem that I
Shall right this sinful impropriety,
And in due guise before my sovereign set
A truth the best of monarchs may forget."

So, on a day, when all El Hakim's court
Sate in the cool pavilion, with no thought
Of past injustice, Bechir, grave of port,
Rode up upon an ass, and with him brought
A great sack, wholly empty: and all eyes
Were fastened on him with unfeigned surprise.

Astonished at the sight, the Caliph cried,
 "Why comest thou, ass-mounted, with that
 sack?"

"Prince of the Faithful," the old man replied,
 "I hope to lay this bag upon the back
Of this dull donkey, when, from where you
 stand,
I've filled it with two bushels of good land."

The spangled courtiers ill concealed their
 mirth,

 But, noting not the great men's smiles at all,
The wrinkled Cadi filled the bag with earth.

 "Allah be thanked, albe the gift is small,"
Quoth he; then tied the sack with practiced
 hand,
And upright for the moment let it stand.

"Prince of Believers," quoth the Cadi then,

 "Age makes my arm grow feeble. Bid some
 one

Among these many young and princely men

 Assist me, and my task is quickly done:
Or haply the Great Caliph shall not lack
For grace to help me load this weighty sack."

Down stepped the Caliph in his rich symar,
Appareled as became Cordova's lord,—
Upon his breast an order like a star,
And at his waist his ruby-pommeled
sword,—
And, grasping with both hands the clumsy
sack,
Essayed to place it on the donkey's back.

In vain: the sinews 'neath the gorgeous dress
Were trained to pleasure, not to toil that
asks
The brawn of carters. Piqued at his distress,
Again he strives, and all his virtue tasks;
Then pauses, smiling, and remarks at length,
"To lift this sack is quite beyond my strength."

"Even so," quoth Bechir; "but if this sack lie
So stark upon you, what shall be the weight
Of the whole field when you have reached the
sky
And stand before the paradisal gate,—
This field the woman lost to pleasure you,
Seized without right? And she a widow, too."

The Caliph blushed. Then, searchingly and
slow,

He scanned his courtiers, and that minister
Cast down his eyes, and winced as from a blow:

“Thus, then, my counsellors teach me to
err,—

As if they deemed injustice were a thing
That ever must seem grateful to a King.

“Great doctors, stuffed with quirks, besiege my
door,

And I hear lawyers mouthing at the bar.
Of seasoned captains I have twenty score,
The least of whom can boast his martial
scar;

But where is he who, with his staff in hand,
Shepherds the lowly people of the land?

“Leave the pavilion! Quit it, one and all!

I give it to the woman who was robbed,
And it shall be to her for house and hall.

Let her forget how bitterly she sobbed,
For widows’ tears are sacred.—Grace to her
Implies a like meed to my minister.

“Give him the bastinado,—twenty strokes,
Laid on at midday in the market-place.
The heaviest one of all a monarch’s yokes,
And they are manifold in any case,
Is that he can not always see the lies
That lurk within the seeming frankest eyes!”

Wise Cadi! Upright Caliph! Oh, to see
The Moor’s despotic justice for an hour:
To watch it blast juridic pliancy,
And pluck the heart from wealth’s exotic
flower:
To sharply straighten out our crooked ways,
And teach us judgment in these latter days!

THE VISION OF OSMOND

IN that Cistercian Abbey of Good Rest,¹
Whose walls aforetime rose in Brittany,
Osmond the monk, above his fellows blest
In visions which the Lord gave him to see,
Still wore the belt of penance next his skin,
And strove right soldierly to conquer sin.

The evensong was ended, and the last
Of the long file of brothers, sandal-shod,
From out the candle-lighted chapel passed,
And Osmond, lifting up his soul to God,
As he was wont, within his cell of stone
Threw back his cowl, and knelt, and prayed
alone.

But prayer was irksome, for the beadman's
heart

Was unresponsive to his mumuring lip.
His bosom felt a sting, a lingering smart:
Slow and more slow the beads began to slip,
And the monk dropped the chaplet ere he
prayed
The *Pater Noster* of the First Decade.

¹ The Abbey of Bon-Repos, mentioned by Montalembert in the "Monks of the West."

For on that evening when he took his stand
At the abbatial table, where he stood
With a bright-burning taper in his hand
While the grave Abbot ate his simple food,
An alien thought, rebellious and unkind,
Had thrust itself into his brooding mind.

“Who is this man,” with muttered word he
said,

“That like a menial I before him stand:
That I must lackey him while he is fed,
And hold a guttering candle in my hand?
Is this Christ’s service? Nay, ’tis fleshly
pride,
And not the meekness of The Crucified!”

Moreover, he was broken with his toil,
And the hot sun had scorched him to the
bone.
His veins were full of fever from the soil,
And his drawn lips could scarce repress their
moan.

Almost the fragile frame and wasted face
Showed life remitted to a half-hour’s grace.

So, dazed, and scarcely knowing what he did,
Upon the meagre pallet of his rest
He flung his aching body down, and hid
His wan face in his hood, and on his breast
Crossed his thin palms, and, wearied unto
death,
Lay twitched with pain, and drew convulsive
breath.

But suddenly it seemed as if the air
Were winnowed by great wings: a faint per-
fume
Was scattered, as of new-blown roses rare,
And lo, a stranger stood within the room:
Some seraph, it should seem, some Prince of
Light,
For all his flowing robe was strangely bright.

A thoughtful brow ennobled the calm face,
Whose lines at once were resolute and meek.
His manly figure, too, had youthful grace,
And by the purple honors of his cheek,
And the bright hair that like a glory shone,
He wist it was none other but St. John.

Then Osmond did not dare to longer look,
But on his brow he felt cool fingers press,—
Cool as white linen drenched in some swift
brook,

And the fierce fever lapsed to nothingness.
In place of twinging joints and fiery pains,
A drowsy dew crept softly through his veins.

“Surely, I slept,” he cried, and thought to
mark

His inch of candle flickering to its death,
But the stone cell was in Egyptian dark,
And in his first surprise he gasped for
breath.

Then the cell opened, and he saw a light,
And sweet St. John ascending out of sight,

Where a glory, streaming out of cloudy por-
tals,

Burned like a boreal banner on the sky,
And wings, and faces,—legions of immortals,—
Were visible to his dilated eye;
And then a voice cried through the heavenly
gate,

“They also serve who only stand and wait!”

And Osmond knew the vision had been sent
To tame his spirit, and his eyes grew wet:
"O thou Beloved Disciple, I relent!

Mine was the pride. Oh, let me not forget
The heavenly lesson thou has taught to me,
This holy instance of humility.

"If thou could'st leave the ever-blesséd choir
To bring the coolness of the middle sky
To a poor monk who felt the fever's fire,
How much more willingly, alas, should I
Before God's Abbot take my place, and stand,
Bearing the lighted candle in my hand!

"True Knight of Christ's Round Table, let me
still

Be of the tonsured Chivalry of God
The simplest soldier! Jesu, do Thy will.
Let me pursue the path which Thou hast
trod,
Till, like Saint Francis, in my hands I see
The marks that show how like I am to Thee!"

Then slowly through the Fifteen Mysteries,
Divided into holy groups of three,
(Each bead a step accomplished to the skies,)
He prayed his pious way on bended knee:
Through the Great Rosary, every bead but
one,
For Matins rang before his task was done.

That day he labored, and he took his place
At evening where he had been wont to stand,
(A tranquil rapture in his pallid face,)
Holding the lighted candle in his hand,
Hard by the Abbot's table, where were spread
His garden herbs and morsel of coarse bread.

But the good Abbot said, "I prithee, sit:
Sit thou at table. 'Tis for me to stand.
And while I stand, thy supper shall be lit
Even by the winking taper in my hand.
I should have seen before how thou wast shent:
Yea, thou shalt judge me as thy penitent."

And he enforced him gently, and he sate.
And all the gray cowls marvelled when they
saw
The Abbot standing while monk Osmond ate,
Because it overset the cloistral law.
And then they said, "He loves him, needs he
must,
To thus abase himself into the dust!"

CAEDMON

CAEDMON the cowherd sate one night among
Jovial companions, bousing mead and ale.
Each in his turn plucked at the harp and sung
Robustiously some fragment of a tale,
Lovesong, or warsong, bawled to sounding
notes
Befitting Saxons of drink-worthy throats.

But when the peasant saw the harp pass on
In turn to his next neighbor on his right,
He would not tarry till the lay was done,
But rose, and slouched away into the night:
Left the loud merrymaking, hung his head,
And slunk off shamefaced to his cattle-shed.

For though he joyed in the sonorous note
When the harp brattled and the minstrel
sung,
There was no sweetness in his rustic throat,
Nor any nimble words upon his tongue.
(His soul heard, but it lay as in a swoon,
Or like a grub, locked in its silk cocoon.)

Much grieving that the music in his breast
Was like the talent buried in the ground,
He burrowed in the straw, and sunk to rest
Beside his cattle: where his sleep was sound
Until such time as, near the crow of cock,
Some stranger roused him with a sudden knock.

"Sing," quoth the stranger, calling him by
name,

"Sing me some ballad."—"I?" quoth Caedmon,
"Nay,

That's why I quit the supper in such shame,

And in the byre have hid myself away.

I have no gift,—which costs me muckle pain."

"Sing, notwithstanding," cried the voice again.

"And if," quoth Caedmon, "I had will to try,

What mote I make my maiden argument?"

"Why," laughed the stranger, "sing of God's
blue sky.

Sing of the spreading of that spacious tent:

The world's beginning, when the green earth
stood

Buttressed forever 'gainst the spouting
flood."

Then Caedmon, like a bird that feels the first
Song-impulse strongly wrestling in its
breast,
Through sixty years of ox-like silence burst,
And sang as if he always had been blest
With voluntary numbers: sang of God,
Worker of wonders, maker of th' abode

Of men, His creatures, Father of the race:
The stretcher-out of that cerulean roof
Which canopies man's pleasant dwelling-place,
And of ten thousand things which are a
proof
Of power, and goodness, and such high design
As shows the Artifex to be divine.

Then Caedmon waked indeed (for 'twas a
dream),
With the strange numbers crooning in his
head,
Foddered his cattle, drank the running
stream,—
And still the dream-born music was not fled,
But hummed and buzzed with something like
the boom
The belted bees make in the clover-bloom.

And the desire to utter forth was strong
Upon him, and he shouted to his thane,—
“Ho, Cedric, come and hear a cowherd’s song:
I have brought forth, albe with muckle pain.
The farrow cow, whose bearing time was past,
Hath got a calf, and gives new milk at last.”

Then Cedric, big and bushy-bearded, laughed
A whinnying horse-laugh, and replied in
scorn,—

“Last night saw merrymaking, and you quaffed
Waist-deep, I wis, from quaigh and drinking-
horn.

But if you say in sooth, sing on, my friend,
And I and my plough-cattle will attend.”

Then sang the groom the verses of his dream
In the strong Saxon of his forthright time:
The broken movement of the hillside stream,
Unaided by the flattery of rhyme,
But full of that rough grandeur that endues
The first expression of the heaven-born muse.

Then Cedric flew (the song was so divine),
As if his hob-nailed heels had sprouted wings,
To Whitby’s abbess,—Hilda, of the line
Of Edwin, of the blonde Northumbrian kings:
(The abbey-walls, in broken majesty,
Still crown the Yorkshire crags that front the
sea:)

Brushed past the porter at the abbey-gate,
Puffing, and with wide eyes, as if his news
Were courtly tidings that no whit mote wait;
Dashed from his honest brow the beaded
dews,
And, stuttering till he made the abbess laugh,
Bawled out, "The coo hath g-g-got a calf!"

The young nuns tittered. Hilda, much disgraced
That light demeanor overset the law
That held her novices so straightly laced,
Reddened, and, with a warning hem and haw,
Replied, "What cow? What calf? What
make you here?
God's Body, but I think you smell of beer!"

But Cedric, less fat-witted than mote seem,
Was soon put into countenance, and said,—
"Last night my cowherd Caedmon had a dream
That left strange matter in his barmy head.
I let ye weet that ye may well inquire.
Rare things have happened at the cattle-byre.

"For sixty years, until his poll was white,
And he was bent like any bishop's crook,
This thrall drave cattle, lay afield at night,
And never spelled a line upon a book.
But now,—my faith, he sings in such accord
As shames the herald angels of the Lord."

Then Caedmon, in his sheepskin tabard, came
Up to the abbey,—to the presence-room,
Where he was questioned of the holy dame
And learned assessors, sitting there in doom ¹
Whether his cowherd's dream had come to pass
Through magic leare, or power of Sathanas.

Much puzzled were the meagre monks who wore
The Celtic tonsure (which they did through
spite
To Bishop Wilfrid:) forty monks, and more,
In gowns of serge, with hempen girdles
dight.
“A churl,” quoth one, “that never learnt his
letters!”
Another, “Unbaptized: how mote *he* teach his
betters?”

“Through God's grace,” Hilda cried. “This is
God's word,
And this is His new prophet: one who sings,
Heaven-prompted, like the sky-ascending bird
That in the gold of morning dips his wings.
He sings such honey-sweetness, steeped in
truth,
The angels must have kept him from his youth.”

¹ In judgment.—The famous abbess Hilda governed a
nunnery and a monastery at one and the same time.

Then great clerks made him spell on Holy
Writ,

And taught him mankind's genealogy;
And as a cleanly beast makes green herbs fit

For food by rumination,² so did he
Chew this new knowledge till he wrought the
whole

Into sweet songs that cheered the Christian's
soul.

O'er English fields when the cloud-shadows pass

In April, with blue gleams of sky between,
And yellow gentians star the meadow-grass,

And pink fire tips the larch's tassels green,
There comes a bird, in garb of Quaker hue,
That iterates all day, "Cuckoo, cuckoo:"

A would-be singer's sole and simple note,

A sweet monotony, which English ears
Love better than the thrush's gayer throat.—

Back in the dimness of a thousand years,
Like the first cuckoo blown across the sea,
So Caedmon sang, with simple melody;

² Venerable Bede's expression is noteworthy:—"Ipse cuncta quae audiendo discere poterat, memorando secum et quasi mundum animal ruminando in carmen dulcissimum convertibat."

And, like the travelled bird of ashen wing,
He burdened every zephyr with his strain,
Till a whole nation, listening, learnt to sing,
And hummed his distiches o'er and o'er again,
Drowning the chants barbaric and "Was-hael"
Which Odin's sons howled over quaighs of ale.

A DREAM OF WAR AND PEACE

It is the dead win battles. . . . The brave
Die never. Being deathless, they but change
Their country's arms for more—their country's heart.
Give then the dead their due: it is they who saved us.

—PHILIP JAMES BAILEY.

WHERE daisies decked the spongy sod,
Beneath an oak's pavilion broad
Reclined at ease, I dreamed away
The long hours of the sultry day.

The brook hard by ran clear as glass,
And sung a drowsy lullaby:
I saw the lintwhite lightly pass,
And marked the crimson butterfly
Pause on the nodding tuft of grass
And wave its wings in ecstasy.

The game-cock from the garden-wall
Flung his sharp challenge over all:
The peacock drew aside the veil
That hid the moons within his tail:
Anon he walked with folded train,
And with harsh voice predicted rain.

"How sweet," I thought, "the world's surcease,
This trammeling-up of grief and care
That drive the spirit to despair:
How passing sweet this Dream of Peace!
Unbroken be these rustic charms
By greed of man or War's alarms,"—
When, full and clear, I seemed to hear
A bugle of heroic note:
Emblazoned banners seemed to float:
Embattled armies swept the plain,
And lengthened all their files,
Trampled the clover and the grain,
And filled the forest aisles.

For all around were signs of war,
Old scars that fields of strife reveal:
The rifle-pit, the long redoubt,
The broken cannon-wheel,—
Memorials of a crimson day,
And thunders that had rolled away:
Unnoted by the rustic's eye,
Save as they clogged his industry;
For what hath he who reaps the grain
To do with Glory's purple pain?

The picture faded, and I knew
The high, heroic note
That thrilled my being through and through
Rose from the thrush's swelling throat,—
The speckled thrush, whose bark-built nest,
Beyond the crumbling mound,
Lay in the angle where men's blood
Had reddened all the ground.

Still thinking of the bugle-call,
I cried, Sing, bird, again!
Pour out thy notes, and let them fall
Refreshingly like rain.
Thou, too, fantastic mocking-bird,
Take up the patriot tale,
And when the oak-tree's top is stirred,
O sing, brown nightingale! ¹

Sing of the daisies, whitening where
The dead men's faces once were white,
When the black guns had ceased to roar,
And darkness closed the fight.
Sing of the bending buttercups
That glitter everywhere:
As yellow as the shoulder-straps
The colonels used to wear.

¹ Meaning the American thrush—quite equal to the nightingale of Europe.

Sing of the corn, with sabre-leaves,
And tawny-tasseled ears,—
Battalions with fixed bayonets,
Green-shakoed grenadiers ;
Of poppies, dancing in the wheat
Of which the farmer brags,
And hollyhocks, whose bannered bloom
Succeeds the battle flags ;

Of belted bees, that in their flight
Hum like the minie-ball,
(The white hives gleam like shelter-tents
Beyond the orchard wall ;)
Of dappled kine, that wade in grass
Up to the dew-lap's fold,
Or loiter where the dandelion
Is spread like cloth-of-gold.

Pipe, blackbirds of the mellow throat,
Upon whose jetty wings
The blood that once ran on this field
In a red spatter clings.
I seem to see, what time your bills
Are pilfering the sheaves,
The sergeants of artillery,
With chevrons on their sleeves.

And when the vapor from the South
Rolls in a volume dun,
The grumbling thunder seems to be
The muttering of a gun:
The pattering drops are musket-balls
That thresh the leafy trees:
The lightning is the naked sword
The trooper brandishes!

But no: this is a nuptial day,
And joy inspires the psalm,—
The bridal of the North and South,
Of pine-tree and of palm.
The hosts I saw, or seemed to see,
Deploying for the fight,
Were only shadowy witnesses,
The sponsors at the rite.

So breathe again, Arcadian flutes,
With unpremeditated strain:
Wild warblers, touch your forest lutes,—
Pipe, quails, that haunt the bearded grain!
Then let joy's note die in each throat,
And in some mournful-breathing key
Whisper of those that tasted death:
Thy gift, Defeat, thine, crimson Victory!

Sing sweetly, softly, pityingly
Above each nameless grave:
Sing *Miserere* first, then chaunt
The requiem of the brave.
Perhaps the souls of those who sleep,
Hearing that minstrelsy,
Shall answer from th' Elysian Fields
With pipes of stillest key.

I sometimes deem that when the lark
Drops bits of music down from heaven,
And whip-poor-wills call from the dark
That veils the thoughtful face of even,
The dead speak: "We dwell not in gloom,
Nor is it bitter thus to die.
There is a window in the tomb:
But show our children where we lie!"

Not that the singer would upbraid,
And mix a cup of wine and gall.
The ghosts of hatred have been laid:
A new day brightens over all.
A hidden purpose ruled the time;
For though War's finger wrote the red de-
cree,
Behind it all there was a thought sublime:
"That which is sown in death and blood shall
be

The harvest's first-fruits—better hearts,
The world's exemplars, or in arms or arts,
One Flag, one Land, and Liberty!"

Dear Nature, whose repairing hand
With healing balm of grass and flowers
Anoints the bruised and bleeding land,
Make thy compassionate spirit ours.
If any with unaltered eye
Regard the hearts that wear the thorn,
Instruct them by thy ministry
How much forgiveness betters scorn.

Cycles of snows and cleansing rains,
Alternate through the ebbing years,
Have purged away the purple stains,
And lo, the milk-white rose appears.
The blue-bell, where the graves are wet,
Gleams like a bit of fallen sky,
And heart's-ease and the mignonette
Arrest the pensive wanderer's eye.

Where bugles rang with silver clang,
Startling the drowsy sentinel,
The trumpet-flower from hour to hour
Gives back the watchword, All is well!
Where sabres bare flashed in the air,
The thistle's lance shakes o'er the dead:
The gladiolus makes the sheath
Of its green sword a peaceful wreath
Of bell-mouthed blossoms red.

The daisy, with its white cockade,
Walks "grand rounds" with the sun;
The four-o'clock shuts like a tent
After the evening gun.
At bugle-call the colors fall,
Where peonies of white and red,
(Beside the tulips, flecked with blood,)
Sleep-heavy, hang the head.

Was that the bivouac's ruddy fire,
Or but the fire-fly's fitful light?
The falling star that blazed but now,
Or the red rocket's upward flight?
'Tis but a dream: no campfire's gleam,
No rocket's burst, no beat of drum!
The stars alone watch out the night
Above a world where all is dumb:

All, save the mournful whip-poor-will,
Who plains within his leafy cell,
Intoning like a shaven monk
At sound of chapel-bell:
All, save the love-lorn mockingbird,
Who wakes and sings beneath the stars,
As if the groves had never heard
The hurly-burly tale of wars.

Born out of season, may I not
Place laurel on the warrior's bier?
Though quiet days have been my lot,
As humble routine marked the year,—
Like him whose corselet Honor laced,
And armed him for the field,
My heart would gladly have embraced
"A sword, a horse, a shield!"

So let me mix this Western wreath
With Southern eglantine,
And thou, gray-coated soldier,—take
This friendly spray of pine.
For though I love the beauteous Flag
Whose field is bright with stars,
I would not wound a heart that loved
"The bonny Stars and Bars!"

RUSTICIANO'S EXORDIUM

RUSTICIANO, the Writer of Pisa—behold, I
am he:

Also I fought on the *Dolphin* when Venice was
conquered at sea!—

Dandolo led us, but Doria beat us, for holy
Saint Mark

Permitted our Doge to be loaden with chains
on a Genoese bark:

Chains round his waist, wrists, and ankles, yet
up like a lion he rose,

And dashed out his brains on the mainmast,
confounding and mocking his foes.

'Twas a terrible sight as he lay there bespat-
tered and dabbled with gore,

Yet we breathed a *Laus Deo* to think that his
sorrow was o'er.

Fetters for us might be waiting, and dungeons,
that break the stout heart,

But the Admiral's debt had been cancelled: mis-
fortune had cast its last dart.

Yet I almost forgot our disgrace as we
sailed into port on that day,
So splendid the sight through the great semi-
circle of Genoa's bay:
Banners, gold-crueted, that flamed as they rose
on the wind from the sea,
Streamers of purple, and shouting ten thou-
sands, who cried, "Victory,"
While the bells of St. Ambrose and white St.
Lorenzo commingled their notes
With the noisy acclaim that rose wilder and
wilder from Genoese throats;
For the Lions that ramped on the ensign of
Venice were humbled at last,
And Dandolo lay, as I tell you, stone-dead in
his chains by the mast.

How I hated the poisonous reptiles that
swarmed there, those black Genoese!
And now they were swollen like toads, and
were lording it over the seas.
They had humbled my Pisa, and given her tears
in the place of her smile:
Half-a-day was enough, in that fight of the
ships off Melloria's isle;
And when mighty Venice made ready her gal-
leys, and crimsoned the waters
With sail upon sail, to the shouts of her sons
and the cheers of her daughters,—

When her helmeted fighters stood crowding the
 decks till the bulwarks were kissed
By the over-bold sea, you may guess 'twas a
 sight that I would not have missed;
And I felt an exuberant joy, like the joy that
 is born of strong wine,
When I cast in my lot with the sailors, and
 looked on their quarrel as mine.
"Venice forever! My blood as an alms in her
 coffers," I said,
"So I pay back the wrong to my Pisa, and
 cover the shame of her dead!"

It is true I was only a writer, and wrought
 with the pen, not the sword,
Yet a scribbler might handle a boat-hook, and
 haul a sea-fighter aboard,
Or lunge with a halberd, and spill as much
 blood as he once wasted ink:
Say, a pint at a time, which is what a man
 bleeds from a stab, I should think.
And though that's a pitiful portion to let from
 the veins of a State,
It's a terrible loss when it spurts from the heart
 of a man who is great;
And it even might hap that the hand of a
 writer, though slender and white,
Should tip the poised beam of the scale, pre-
 dooming the fate of the fight;

And in the close grapple if Genoa's Admiral
happened to meet
Face to face with a Pisan I knew, he was sure
to fall dead at his feet.

There was witchery, too, in the pageant, the
glamour of panoplied War:
The arms and the armor, the gold-coated
Doge, with his eye like a star;
The pomp of the galleys, the songs that arose
from the black-bearded throats,
The confident pride and the martial defiance
that breathed in the notes;
The storm-rush, the trumpets, the creak of
the cordage, and, better than all,
(Like a tempting, black, musk-scented cluster,
just ripe for its fall,)
That death which we fear so, yet strive for.
Thou bony-faced sweetheart! Oh,
Death,
To whom we blow kisses, and strike up the lilt
with a lover's gay breath!
Yea, it seemed almost lovely to get such a
knock on the head
As serves as a card of admission and opens the
gates of the dead,—
Though I never once thought (when the
mildewy portals should grindingly
creak)

How I'd scandalize Cyrus, and Julius, and,
grander than either, the Greek,
Nor what a mean figure I'd cut, with my pitiful
two-penny crown,
In the eyes of such demigods, splendid and
haughty with awful renown.
But all this is changed in a twinkling: at least,
it was altered for me,
When I learned what is done at the end of a
"glorious battle at sea."
(So the blossom that charmed us lies withered:
discolored and perishing matter:
So the egg that we drop is translated, and
ends in a sickening spatter.)
For when we trooped down from the gang-
plank, and marched four and four
through the street,
'Twas then that my soul tasted wormwood,
'twas then that my grief was complete;
For the rabble reviled us, and once a great
lady, all beauty and grace,
Snatched at my tunic, and rent it, and laughed
as she spat in my face.
And I said, "This is War, this is Glory, but
what are the laurels I win?
To rot in a dungeon, to starve till my buttock-
bones stick through the skin!
Ah, yes, it were better if things had gone on
in the old-fashioned way,—

Still writing my *Cycle of Arthur*, and spinning
it out day by day
On the creamy, clean sheets of fresh vellum.
But now all is lost, all is done:
Even now, as I clank in my fetters, I feel the
last warmth of the sun."

Have you ever known prison-walls, after the
freedom and breadth of the seas?
Thank God that your jailers were not like
those vermin, the black Genoese!
Thank God that, while bolting you in where
your dungeon-bars reddened with rust,
Christ's pity still gave you a pallet, some
water, a bone, and a crust!
Thank God that when comrades in misery gave
up the ghost with a sigh,
They covered their faces, and buried them
decently under the sky,
Where the grass and the flowers might caress
them. *My* comrades were hurled to the
waves,
And the bellies of ravenous things of the ocean,
yea, these were their graves;
For they pitched out the corpses to cram the
cold gullets that swarm in the seas,
While we heard the hoarse curses that rained
like a sleet on the black Genoese.

How we rotted and stank there, with nothing
to see but our own famished faces!
How we envied the beasts, which had sight of
the grass, and longed to change places!
How slowly the days went, with nothing to
hear but the ravings of pain,
Or the querulous quarrels of sick men, or,
sometimes, the swish of the rain,
Or the sharp clap of thunder, or, something re-
sembling the drone of a bee,
The sound of the waves sweeping in from the
purple Ligurian Sea;
For the walls were so thick that all sounds
were excluded as if from a tomb,
Except when a tempest tore heaven, and deep-
ened the natural gloom
That filled the bleak prison as pitch fills a
cauldron from bottom to brim.
But suddenly something like sunshine illumined
the walls that were dim.
When the patience of life seemed exhausted,
when card-packs grew greasy and
blurred,
When the draught-boards were broken in
pieces, and nobody uttered a word,
A miracle happened. Thank God for the man
who can tell a new story!
I thank Him myself, and account it a rational
part of His glory

That He gave us that treasure which all the
gold coins of the world could not buy,—
That Venetian, pointed of beard, with the quiet
command in his eye,
With the lofty, grave brow, and the parallel
lines there, like furrows that run
Through the share-sundered fields where the
wide-horned, white oxen's flanks smoke
in the sun.
I can see him and hear him to-day as he cried
to us, "Children, come here.
I will tell you a story, to pass away time, if
you give me good ear:
Yea, a thousand rare stories, as strange as the
strangest, yet true,
Of the days and the years when the life of the
Tartars was all that I knew."
For this was the bronzed Messer Marco, that
Polo whom Venice forgot
While he served the Grand Khan of the Tar-
tars: prime minister, prince, and what
not.
Long years did he serve him, in palace, in
camp, and in courts of great Kings,
Bearing his passports (great squares of pure
gold), and his dread signet-rings;
Sailing in ships through great seas in pursuit
of his mighty designs,
And beating to port when the sun had twice
circled the Twelve Starry Signs;

Watching great battles, where half of the
world was a half-an-hour's prize,
As Herodotus wrote of but only this Marco be-
held with his eyes.

But first let me tell you the wonderful story
of how he returned
With his sire and his uncle, all three of them
Tartar-clad, battered, and burned,
To seek for his home in the City of Palaces,
whence he departed
With the bloom of the peach on his puerile
cheeks, where the down had just started.
High-capped, and black-bearded, skin-coated,
and seemingly dropped from the sky,
They groped their way slowly, and earned the
regard of each curious eye,
Till they found *Casa Polo*, just there at the
turn of the well-noted street,—
Well known when the marbles of Venice had
echoed the tread of their feet,
But now rather doubtful. Then, more like
three beggars than men of great place,
They lifted the knocker, and prayed Holy
Mary to grant them her grace.
'Twas a serving-maid answered the summons,
but when she beheld the black Tartars
She was struck with a palsy, and shook till she
nearly fell down through her garters.

Then she banged the door to. "Knock again,"
quoth the uncle, "and make the halls
roar."

So they rattled away till a faded gentility answered the door

With a "What is your pleasure, sirs," spoken
in Tuscan, and then the remark,

"We never give alms, and especially not when
the evening grows dark."

Then the three Tartars laughed, to the faded
gentility's angry amazement,

And when they replied in Italian it added still
more to his dazement.

"Don't mention the alms, gracious signor. If
that were the question, no doubt

The cue would be ours to do charity. Know,
that we seek this house out

Because we are Polos: no less than those Merchants,
the wandering Three,

Burned swart by the suns of the desert, and
roughened by gales of the sea,

Who, after third part of a century under a
strangely starred sky,

Have yearned for the faces of kinsmen, and
crept back to Venice to die."

What a night in the old *Casa Polo*! The *ci-devant* Tartars were clad
In robes of the exquisite purple achieved by the
looms of Bagdad.

A great feast was spread in the room with the
wonderful ceiling of blue,
Where all of the Polos were gathered, including
a churchman or two.
The first course was ended, when up rose the
dusky, mysterious guests,
Discarded the purple that flowed from their
shoulders and girded their breasts,
And flung it as alms to the servants. Then,
clothed in rick damask, as red
As the leaves of blush-roses, they sate at the
table, and ate of white bread,
First washing their hands in pure water; then,
doffing their robes as before,
Apportioned them out to the serving-folk.
Garmented richly once more
In deep crimson velvet, they made their ablutions
with water sweet-scented,
Ate a morsel at table, and then, while the folk
deemed the trio demented,
Made another strange alms of apparel. This
finished, each former grandee
Came forth plainly clad like the others. The
servants, by two and by three,
Faded out of the chamber, and Marco, retiring
a moment, returned
With the dirty, coarse surcoats of sheepskin,
which even a beggar had spurned.
Then each draws a knife, or stiletto, whose
slender blade icily gleams,

And all fall to slashing the linings, and rip-
 ring away at the seams
 Of the weather-stained tabbards. *Prut, prut*
 go the knives as they sever the stitches,
 Producing a sight never witnessed since legs
 were inserted in breeches.
 At every fifth stitch a miraculous diamond, a
 "Mountain of Light,"
 Was accouched from some womb in the sur-
 coats, and dazzled the onlookers' sight:
 Kohinoors by the dozen, each sheepskin dis-
 gorging its treasures, good-lack,
 The same as a peasant pours acorn-nuts out of
 the mouth of a sack.
 Lord, how they glittered, and mingled the frag-
 ments of rainbows with stars:
 Splendor on splendor of turquoises, beryls, and
 moonbeamy spars,
 Lordly male sapphires, and amethysts purple as
 Italy's sea;
 Opals that blazed like a comet, and rubies of
 red brilliancy,
 Rose-tinted pearls from Zipangu, and snow-
 tinted pearls from Zeilan,
 Designed for the necks of Sultanas, and coral
 beads strung in Tu-fan,
 Carbuncles, zircons, and emeralds green as the
 lushest of grasses,—
 Enough to have ransomed all hell, were they
 doled out in candles and masses.

How the company gasped, as a garnet
popped out like a hen's egg in size!
What a covetous, murderous lustre flamed up
in their gloating, wide eyes!
What passions swept over their faces, now
blanched, and now red as a rose!
How they stared, with mouths open, and then
what a chorus of *Ah's* and of *Oh's*!
How they longed for a grab at those baubles!
How much they comprised where they
sparkled!
Glory, and beauty, ambition, white virtue, all
crimes that have darkled,—
They were all mixed together, and angels and
devils might choose from the heap,
Each one to his purpose. A cardinal, seeing
those gems, could not sleep,
And the Pope, had he gazed at the pile, might
have bargained to sell
The right to do things that sent emperors
down to the red core of Hell.

What pitiful wretches we are! Of the house
of the Polos not one
Welcomed his kin in the Tartars who carried
the bronze of the sun
In their faces, and showed by their beards,
crisply curling, how oft they had trod
The foot-scorching desert; but when their rags
vomited rubies, good God,

How they fell on their necks, how they wept,
how they cried, "It is they, it is they!"
And so did the city's proud hypocrites, throng-
ing their chambers each day,
Till they bolted the doors on the smirkers. But
that is outside of my matter.
For Marco, my hero, whose glory the centuries
never shall batter,
He emptied his riches to swell the armada,—
the militant ships,—
Commanded his galley, bled duly, saw Venice
pass into eclipse,
And bated his ardor in prison, as I did, for
many a day.
But blessed be God for His mercy! I praise
His mysterious way!
Behold, how He cast down the mighty, and,
doing so, gave it to me,
The least of His servants, to bourgeon and
put out my leaf like a tree:
Like a cedar, a bay-tree, exhaling an odorous
spirit where once
I was but a dead trunk without sap, and was
reckoned a butt and a dunce;
For the very first time I heard Marco discours-
ing I knew
That the dream of my futile, empirical life was
about to come true.

For what is so great as to write a great
Book? Why, nothing at all.
Kings' fingers relax from their scepters. They
lie 'neath the funeral pall:
They are hearsed or in bronze or in marble,
then lost in the years' desolation,
And only God keeps them in mind, to award
them their due of damnation.
But a Book, like the oil and the meal of the
widow, is never decreased,
And, grounded in wisdom, is fragrant forever,
like gums of the East;
And the head that composed it,—the owner of
that is forever a King,
For he reigns without heirs, and the Book is
his throne, and his truncheon, and ring.

And that's why I listened while Marco dis-
coursed to the wretches around him.
That's why I joyed in my heart, like the rest,
that at last we had found him,—
The man who could *utter*, and paint in true
colors the world-sundered scene,
Till it made itself real, and moved like the fig-
ures we throw on a screen.
And that's why I writ it in true *Lingua Franca*,
intending that all,
From the Count in his castle, the soldier in tent
to the servant in hall,

Might ponder and pore on the wonderful pictures,
and thank *le Bon Dieu*
That he saw them before he was gripped in his
grave by the roots of the yew.

So take this Book, Princes, and read it:
likewise ye Dukes, and ye Earls,
Both ye and your Ladies, who wear their bro-
cades and their collars of pearls.
Read how an Emperor, ruling three parts of
the world by his nod,
Begged the proud Bishop of Rome for the
Blood and the Body of God.
"Kublai, the Lord of the World, to the Triple-
Crowned Pontiff, all hail!
Does your Holiness wish in your heart that the
Nazarene's Cross should prevail?
Then send me a hundred wise prelates, well
skilled in the Seven Great Arts,
To show the White Christ to my people, and
plant the true seed in their hearts;
With a flask of the oil from the cresset, whose
flame is both light and perfume,
In Holy Jerusalem burning forever before the
Lord's tomb."
What a chance for the See of St. Peter! How
Cæsar and Charlemagne shrink,
Compared with the victor foreshadowed! And
what was the end, do you think?

Those two Preaching Friars, who scuttled
away without striking a blow,
Those trembling betrayers of Christ, Fra Wil-
liam, and Fra Niccolo.
Quarrels of Guelphs and of Ghibelines,—these
were the bane of man's hope,
And it all came to dust and gray ashes, that
world-changing dream of the Pope.
Cowards and traitors! Cowl, and biretta, and
triple-tiered crown,—
All rubbish! No hero to take up the gauge
that the Tartar flung down!
If only St. Francis had been there, that fiery
Knight-Errant of God,
With his band of Poor Brothers! Aye, *he*
would have scattered the Christ-seed
abroad,
And reaped the white harvest. And then,
what a story for minstrel to sing:
The Epic of Christ and His Captains, the
War of the Heavenly King!
But let us not weep over wine that was spilt,
though I feel in my heart
That Peter's Successor let slip a rare chance
to have played a great part;
For what had been greater or grander than,
sowing the Gospel abroad,
To have conquered the Odorous East through
the weaponless Soldiers of God?

Read again of great Kublai, the Grand
 Khan of Khans, and the dread Lord of
 Lords,
 His elephants, war-steeds, and horsemen, their
 lances, their bows, and their swords;
 His wedges of gold, and his cats'-eyes, his
 beryls, that dazzled the view,
 And his marvellous Palace,—four miles on each
 side,—which he built in Shan-du;
 Of the reeds of the marsh which the Tartar
 magicians had written upon:
 How they wrestled, foreshowing the down-
 fall in battle of Presbyter John;¹
 Of the golden pagodas of Burmah, with mellow
 bells ringing to prayer,
 And the vastness of swarming Cathay, where
 the porcelain palaces are.
 And withal you shall read of strange countries
 which only my Marco had seen,
 Of deserts that burn like red embers, and val-
 leys delightfully green:
 Where the rose breaks her casket of spikenard,
 and tragacanth bleeds from the trees:
 Where the pearl-diver fights the blue shark on
 the floor of the coral-paved seas.

¹ Commonly abbreviated to Prester John.

So take this Book, Princes, and read it:
likewise ye Dukes, and ye Earls,
Both ye and your Ladies, who wear their bro-
cades and their collars of pearls.
When you loll by the fireside in winter, and fret
at the slow-footed hours,
While the sleet crusts the glass in your mul-
lions and beats a tattoo on your
towers,
You shall pore on the wonderful parchment,—
plush-covered, with hasps of red gold,—
And read Messer Marco's great story, the
strangest that ever was told;
And when you have mustered your lances, am-
bitious of battailous scars,
It shall solace the Ladies who sigh till they
welcome their Lords from the wars.—

RUSTICIANO, THE WRITER OF PISA, BEHOLD, I AM
HE:

ALSO I FOUGHT ON THE *DOLPHIN* WHEN VENICE
WAS BEATEN AT SEA!

THE MONK AND THE ASPEN-TREE

CERVA the monk, upon whose breast
The penitential garments rest,
(Hairy and rough, such as eremites wear
That spend their pious lives in prayer,)
Is resting under his favorite tree.
Below and beyond him stretches the sea,
And behind him rises the time-worn wall
Of the Carmelite Convent that looks o'er all:
For it sits on a crag where the clouds come
and go,
And the pine and the aspen 'round it grow.

Rude is the masonry that ye see,
When ye climb the height
To prove for a night
The bare-footed brothers' courtesy;
For there ye may claim a pallet-bed,
And a cup of wine, and a morsel of bread,
For the sake of Christ and charity.

All seems holy, but all seems old:
A leaf from the past, a tale that is told.
Yet not more gray those walls than he,
The ancient man of the priory.

Eighty years their snows have shed
Flake by flake on his hoary head,
And the hinges are rusty in either knee:
His palsied hand can scarce command
The slipping beads of the rosary.
Yet he says Ave Mary as well as he may
When he hears the convent bell,
At the Four Stations pauses to pray,
And kneels to the crucifix in his cell.

The summer air is in a swoon,
And the sails droop idly out at sea,
But over the monk the aspen-tree
Is singing a leafy tune:
No idyl of dendral ecstasy,
Born of the odorous breath of June,
But the musical pain of the *Miserere*;
For every silvery, palpitant leaf
Seems wrung with a strange, insistent grief,
And Cerva wonders how this should be.

For each motionless flower burns like a light
On the holy altar, a taper bright,
And the high, brown grasses burn the same,—
Tall, straight candles of steady flame.
In earth, in heaven there is never a motion,
Save where, far down, the heaving ocean

Landward urges a billow slow,
While the ships rock idly to and fro,
And the sun on the long and level brine
Scatters his splendors opaline.

And lo, the monk sinks down on his knee,
And begins to murmur the *Kyrie*.
For now he remembers how, long ago,
When the ground was white with Yule-tide
snow,
And the wild north-wind by fits would howl,
The Abbot threw back his dusky cowl,
And slowly read with deep, rich voice
The evening homily of his choice,
And closed with a legend, sweet and old,—
Writ, as it should be, all in gold.

And the legend said: When The Crucified
On ignominious Calvary died,
The cross on which he shed His blood
Was verily made of aspen-wood;
And ever since that Lifting-Up,
(That bitter draught from the wormwood cup,)
The conscious tree, wherever it grows,
Feels the pain of the Lord and His thorny
woes,
And when the last breath of the west-wind dies
Shivers, and shudders, and trembles, and sighs
With Christ's transmitted agonies.

"Ah, Lord," cried Cerva, "that all these years
I, with my vigils, and prayers, and tears,
Should have been less mindful, alas, of Thee
Than this bark-clad disciple, this sorrowful
tree!"

And Cerva wept as he knelt in his place,
And hid in his hands the thin, wan face.

* * * * *

'Tis the Mass of Christ, the Feast of the Lord,
The natal day of the Light and the Word,—
Of the Great Physician of Galilee,
Who salved the sick world's misery.—
When days are sullen, and the hills are iced,
We mouth the name of the new-born Christ:
We turn for a moment to hear the bells
In the crisp and star-sprent atmosphere,
And then we go back to ring our own knells,
And the White Christ fades with the end of
the year.

We are all Monk Cervas without the cowl,
And we read the story when Yule-blasts howl.
But when the earth wakes with its million buds,
And the sap creeps up in the thawing woods;
When the long, rich thunders that south-winds
bring
Sound like the chariot-wheels of Spring;

When every May's birth brings to pass
The miracle of leaves and grass,—
How many remember the aspen-tree,
And the wan-faced Christ in His agony?
Forgive us, Lord: Oh, intercede,
And teach our hardened hearts to bleed!

THE KING OF YOUTH

THE gold-clad Caliph, youthful Suliman,
 (Straight as a palm, and passing fair to
 see,)

Was lapped in splendor for a little span,
 And in Damascus held the sovereignty:
Yet most he gloried in his manly grace,
His noble port, and comeliness of face.

Now, by my faith, it is a pleasant thing
 To be the Lord of Beauty and of Youth,
And, by my faith, 'twere good to be a King,
 If Kings were never strangers to the truth:
Albe the more part of the world, I wis,
Mote find in glistering grief its highest bliss.

Be this as be it may, the Arab King
 Set little store by all that made him great:
Horsemen in steel, footmen with pike and sling,
 Spearmen and archers, and the gorgeous
 state
Of Islam's richest court, ere yet its sword
Wasted the Western Gardens of the Lord.

He loved himself, and many a time he said,
"How idly do the hempen homespuns prate,
Who envy Kings that taste of wheaten bread:
Who say, 'Behold the glory of their state,
Their parks, their palaces, the rare delights
In which they pass delicious days and nights.'

"They do not wit that Fate may draw the
cord,—

That with a twang it may rebound to-day,
And with sharp summons bid the sceptred
Lord

Depart like any beggar on his way:
Nor do they deem that I, a very King,
Do hold my truncheon but a silly thing.

"But for this frame of mine,—ah, that is good,
Right goodly is this case that I do wear:
This white and red wherewith I am endued,
This rippling beard, this hyacinthine hair,
This poet's brow, these eyes of starry light,
And this right arm that doth not shun the
fight."

Once, in a chamber of his alcazar,
Having but just renewed his popped bloom
In a sweet-scented bath, and from a jar
Had precious Indian oil, mixt with perfume,
Make glossy all his flowing beard, he rose,
And, fairer than the slender tree that grows

By Forat's ¹ waters, lingered, silent-wise,
Before a mirror. His unequaled dower
Of beauty claimed the homage of his eyes;
And, turning to the Harem's sweetest flower,
"O Omalissam," ² cried he, "of a truth,
I am the undisputed King of Youth!"

From her divan the bright Sultana strook
White fingers o'er her cittern's silver wires;
And like a grey-beard sage who reads a book
Wherein is writ the end of all desires,
She sang in quiet wise a little lay
From out a poet of a vanished day.

"Yea, thou hast beauty: this no railing,
Malignant critic may deny.
But mortal beauty hath this failing,
That, still inconstant, it will fly.

"Thine, too, shall pass, as in the meadow
The flower falls where the plough doth run:
Yea, it shall fleet as fleets the shadow
Across the forehead of the sun."

¹ The Euphrates, to whose banks the palm is native.

² "The Lady of the Precious Necklace."

Ah! Fleet as fleets the shadow? Must it be?
Is there no respite? May I not command
Decay to tarry, as from sea to sea,
I order armies? Is my kingly hand
Powerless 'gainst age and wrinkles, rheumy
eyes,
Stooped shoulders, aches, and such-like mis-
eries?

And in this Field of Love, where I have been
A captain and good soldier,—must I heed
The trumpet of retreat, depart the scene,
And bear a bitter memory for my meed?—
So mused he, as he heard the soft voice sing
To the clear cadence of the tinkling string.

Pain clouded the King's face, albe he spake
No word in answer: and as swift as light
There stole into his heart a gnawing ache,
And all his members felt a chilling blight;
And from the happiest monarch, east or west,
He was thrust down among the wretchedest.

The withered limbs of eld, the thin, gray hair,
The bones, and deadly odors of the tomb,—
These swept away the Harem's faces fair:
The cheeks that rivalled Gul's red rose's
bloom.
Kings' trappings, festal splendor, love's de-
light,—
Lo, how they gathered mildew in his sight!

And he betook him to an inner place
That shuttered out the sun and the green
earth,
And lay on his gold couch a little space,
And nowise would be holpen. His soul's
dearth
Too bitter was for words, and with a sigh
His sceptre and self-love were both put by.³

So drank this foolish one the wormwood cup,
And was enveloped in the starless night,
And a new kinglet sate him down to sup.
Omar Ben Abdelaziz was he hight:
And the swart Paynims hailed his rising star,
And said the Chotba in the Alminbar.⁴

³ The Caliph Suleiman Ben Abdelmelic died at Merg-Dabic, in the country of Kinserina, on the 21st of the Moon Safir, in the year of the Hegira 99, after he had reigned two years and eight months, under the circumstances related in the verse. See Conde's *Arabs in Spain*, Vol. I, p. 91.

⁴ The public prayer for the new King, made from the pulpit (Minbar, or Alminbar) of the principal mosque.

KARILEFF AND THE WREN

BEAD-COUNTING Karileff, the monk of Gaul,
Fared forth at morning, pruning-hook in
hand,
To labor till the twilight dew should fall;
For now the green leaf rustled through the
land,
The birds were building in the oak and pine,
And it was time to trim the budding vine.

For here the monks did Benedict's commands,
And with tanned cheeks toiled in the open
air:
The fragrant wax of labor in their hands,
And in their mouths the honey-bag of
prayer,—
Prayer mixed with labor, those two precious
keys,
Which ope the gates of heavenly mysteries.

But when the sun flamed o'er the eastern wood,
And leveled all the lances of his light,
The fervor smote him through his pointed
hood,
And the salt sweat-drops blurred his failing
sight;
And so he loosed his girdle hastily,
And hung his monkish weed upon a tree.

Then, with his tonsured pate scorched by the
sun,

He wrought as a vine-dresser all the day,
Docking the tendrils which began to run,
And from his pear-tree pruned the shoots
away:

At sunset signed the cross upon his breast,
And meekly murmured, "*Consummatum est!*"

Approaching where his frock hung on the tree,
And reaching out his hand to pluck it down,
The gentle-hearted friar smiled to see

A bird fly out,—a wren, both small and
brown;

And when he looked with curious eye, behold,
A mottled egg lay in the garment's fold.

"The seed of life, that mystery of God,"

Quoth Karileff. "This tiny, speckled thing
Shall send a living messenger abroad,

And the warm sun shall glint upon its wing,
And the small bill shall pipe, in its own way,
Deus rex meus at the break of day.

"The frock shall hang there, since the mother's
breast

Hath touched it to a holier use than mine.
Come back, small housewife: come, and warm
the nest,

For naught of harm shall hap to thee or
thine.

The days are hot, and I can spare the hood
Till thou hast hatched the eggs and reared
the brood."

So on the tree the monkish habit hung
Through the long summer days, in shine and
rain,

While the grape-clusters, now no longer young,
Bulged more and more, and took a purple
stain;

And Karileff, still mumbling Latin words,
With a boy's passion watched the growing
birds.

And when the little, feeble wings were grown
To confident pinions, and the flight was
broad,

And mother-bird and nestlings both were flown,
The gentle beadman turned his thoughts to
God:

"As these wren-chicks have been erstwhile to me,
So I, the man, O Lord, have been to Thee.

"For Thou hast kept me, with a watchful eye,
 (An old, unmated bird) safe in my nest;
And when the time is ripe for me to fly,
 I hope to end the flight upon Thy breast.
I may not see beyond the things of dust,
But in Thy mercy I may safely trust."

Is there no lesson for our noisy day,
 To give us pause amid the strife and stress?
Be not hard-hearted. Heed the beasts, I pray,
 And show the dumb things every gentleness.
I do believe that Christ had such in mind
When He pronounced the words which all know
 where to find.¹

¹ "For as much as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me."

THE CONSOLATION OF THE GROVES

THE kine stand flank-deep in the shaded pool
Where the trout shuns the angler. From
 their lips,
As their broad muzzles lift from out the cool
 Unruffled flood, the limpid water drips.
A pastoral contentment fills their eyes,
For their seclusion is beyond the flies.

And all is silent, save the drowsy sound
Of the soft-lapping water. Overhead,
With their full dower of living greenness
 crowned,
With brown and lengthening shade the
 beeches spread,
Recalling Tityrus and his amorous lay
To Amaryllis on that summer's day.¹

¹ Virg., *Bucolica*. Ecl. I, 1-3.

It is not that this shady solitude
 (Where soft airs stir the branches, and the
 leaves
Move like the lips of Druids,) doth exclude
 The wild world and its warrings: all that
 grieves,
Tears, and ambitions, and whatever man
Invents to vex him through his feverish span,—

It is not through the absence of these things
 That this midsummer spot is like a place
Enchanted. I have been as one that flings
 His gage down, and strikes at the visored
 face;
Nor would I have it otherwise, for life
Sickens without the spur of some great strife.

But 'tis that this communion of the trees
 Is sweeter than a woman's sweetest words.
They have no vague, heart-hidden mysteries.
 Their only secrets are the nests of birds.
They lean most lovingly o'er him who rests
Beneath them, like a mother with white breasts

Above her first-born.—See them, as they grow,
 With green and leafy garments, and with all
That elfin music which, when light winds blow,
 Rises from their brown branches like a small
But audible melody from a low-voiced flute,
Till the gusts die, and all again is mute!

And I do love them with a passionate heart,
And clasp them, as when one with out-
stretched arms

Reclaims a maiden that was kept apart

From him by iron fate, or strange alarms,
Clanging forevermore through weary years,
And making hearts dissolve themselves in tears.

Their branches droop with delicate caress,—

Not like a woman's, for there is no white
Deceptive hand, which fondles till distress

O'ertakes the spirit, and a cureless blight
Chills natural feeling, and o'erclouds the mind,
And makes men exiles when among menkind:

But all is simple, and the exquisite sense

Of unambiguous love and purity,
From its own gentleness the more intense,

('Tis strange how gentle giant-things can
be,)

Comes like the sudden shower to these same
trees,

Whose drinking leaves murmur their ecstasies.

I make each one a woman, hours and hours,—
When, all her soul summoned into her eyes,
She *looks*, and by one lambent glance o'er-
powers

All language, soars above its fallacies,
And straightway cleaves her way into the heart,
As the live lightning tears an oak apart.

And what is sweetest is, that by that look
They do not mean betrayal; there is not,
As oft-times in the innocent water-brook,
Or where the flowers grow in some lovely spot,
The beautiful coiled snake of treachery.
Hence this distinction,—woman, and a tree!

And therefore I do love them; therefore I
Sink in their green embraces. Through
their hair,
Their verdurous tresses, patches of blue sky
Show like the turquoises that Queens do
wear;
And in their cool enfoldment one may rest,
Sure that he presses no Delilah's breast.

They are a medium by which my heart
Forgets its bitterness,—by which my mind
Resumes its dignity, and stands apart
From things debasing and from souls un-
kind:
Subsides into its own tranquillity,
As tempests melt to silence on the sea.

Therefore to this new passion I devote
A chastened spirit. Here shall always be
The woodlark's unpremeditated note,—
Instructress in benign philosophy.
From this repeated intercourse I'll learn
How honey may quell wormwood in life's urn.

I joy that, notwithstanding floods of grief,
And the volcanic ashes that have rained
Down on my heart's one flower of tender leaf,
Something of life at least hath yet remained;
And therefore, Nature, unto whom I pray,
I thank thee for these trees and this fair day.

Hail, and farewell, ye sylvan priestesses,
Ere the still eve comes in with sandals gray!²
Groves, more than shrines, abound in mysteries,
And he who lingers here might learn to pray.
Now is pronounced by the fast-fading light
Day's *Nunc Dimittis*. Ye green trees, good
night!

² "While the still morn went out with sandals gray."
—MILTON.

DEVOTIONAL FEELING

CONDUCT me, pensive Fancy,
To some tall Gothic fane,
When the westering Day-star glimmers
Against the pictured pane,
Filling the priest-trod chancel
With a soft and purple fire,
And falling in bars of splendor
Behind the latticed choir.

What time that halo saintly
The air and spot embalms,
The Nazarene shall show me
His purple-piercéd palms;
And aureoled martyrs olden,
Of tranquil visage bright,
Shall slowly pass before me
In the transfiguring light.

And haply from the organ,
With lips of burnished gold,
With archangelic passion
The prelude shall be rolled;
And while the shade grows browner,
And still the deep tones fall,

The cadences shall govern
That dim processional;
And when the saffron sandals
Of day no longer gleam,
The solemn-brooding silence
Like God's own peace shall seem.

MALIBRAN AND LITTLE PIERRE

The Lord of all loves beauty. Therefore He
Made woman beautiful, and did her mind
To every sweet imagining decree.
Man made the lute, but God her voice designed,
And first approved delightful minstrelsy.—
Oh, what a goddess, when her heart and face
Have all the beauty of her voice in song!
Ah, what misfortune for our clownish race
Such hearts haste heavenward, where they most belong!
Therefore the crystal night-dews have been steeping
Some half-forgotten dust for many a year.
Roses, let your soft rootlets still be creeping
Around her swarded couch more near and near!
You shall remember her in June-time blushes,
And your gold hearts shall bid her live a span.
And we,—whene'er we hear the meadow-thrushes,
We'll say, "A summer mass for Malibran!"

* * * * *

A PALE-FACED boy, with curls of yellow,
Stood at the lady's door,
In his thin, white fingers, all a-tremble,
A crumpled music-score.

"I thought," he said, as his pale face reddened
Up to his golden hair,
"I'd ask you, lady, if I might dare to,
To sing my little air.

"My name is Pierre, ma'am. We are French:
I mean, my mother and I.
I want to buy her some oranges:
She's sick, and like to die."

The lady stretched a jeweled hand out:
With what white teeth she smiled:
She looked at the paper, humming softly,—
"And did you write it, child?"

"Here's a crown," on the curls of yellow
Laying her fingers white.
"We'll see your mother,—and here is a ticket:
You shall hear me sing to-night."

Oh, it was splendid! Lights, and diamonds,
And beauty everywhere:
The scent of sachet, the gorgeous ladies
Bewildered the brain of Pierre.

At last she came. Pierre waited breathless,
And then the mighty band—
A forest of fiddles—played his music,
To the sweep of the leader's wand.

And then she sang it. Angels' singing!
And oh, how simple, too:
The jeweled ladies' breasts were heaving,
And their eyes were wet with dew.

Out in the starlight, home to his mother:
He walked as if on air,
For the fairest singer in noisy Europe
Had sung the song of Pierre.¹

He knelt by his bedside. All of a sudden
A hand touched his yellow hair.
He turned and looked,—and he was frightened,
For Malibran was there.

* * * * *

Therefore, ye roses, bloom your sweetest
Where monuments do rust:
Brave buds, whose beauty is completest,
Shed leaves upon that dust!

¹ It is said that the song became the rage in London, and that Pierre himself became a successful composer.

DEAD

Grow, bitter weeds of the desert, and stifle the
roses of June!

Nightshade is bluer than harebells, and pop-
pies, that drowse at high noon,
Are dearer by grace of their poison than lilies
that bring their white boon!

All that I asked was to see from a distance the
petals unfold,—

The leaves of the blossom that beckoned the
bee to its centre of gold,

Indulging the hope that its beauty might baffle
the frost and the cold.

Yet this was denied me. I see in the track of
the quickening rain

Cicuta, and henbane, and cockle and tares in
the billowy grain,

And things whose sharp prickles attest every
moment the triumph of Pain;

And Evil and Ugliness seem to be lording it all
the day long,
And Meekness and Virtue seem still to be flouted
by Passion and Wrong,
In spite of the jubilant sun, and the thrush
with his wonderful song!

And I wonder at whiles if the balance, weighed
down by the dross every day,
Shall ever swing true, and the pearl and the
rubies hoist upward the clay:
If the mildew shall ever be banished that
splotches the musk-rose in May.

All I know is, that waiting is weariness, leav-
ing God out of the case.
He watches the star-dust, congealing for æons
of æons in space,
Till it globes in the planet that rolls with un-
speakable grandeur and grace;

And 'tis only a swing of the pendulum here, as
He measures the years,
While the centuried aloe crawls up to its bloom
and the blossom appears,—
And yet, when *we* beg for a respite, He gives us
our passionate tears!

THE CHORISTER OF ST. MAURICE

A MEROVINGIAN widow, poor in goods,
But rich in grace and loyalty to God,
From her rude hut amid the Alpine woods
On St. Jude's feast-day fared down where
the broad
And swift Rhone river's purple mirror shows
Th' inverted mountains with their dreaming
snows,—

Down to the abbey which the peasants call
The Castle of St. Maurice. Gray and old,
It still lifts up its memorable walls,
And legends, sweet as roses, rich as gold,
Still haunt about it; and at matin prime
The bell clinks as it did in ancient time:

Knolls for the *Angelus*, when the brown shade
Slants from the mountains to the vale be-
low.—

The abbey reached, the good dame's steps were
stayed;
And when the abbot, in the evening glow,
Received her with a *benedicite*,
She answered in her own tongue, "Peace to
thee!"

But in the presence of the holy man,—
Gentle, but with a look serene and high,
And deep, religious eyes that seemed to scan
Beyond the world into eternity,—
The mother faltered. Words refused to come:
She blushed in her confusion, and was dumb.

The gracious abbot smiled, and made a sign
Which his cowed secretary swiftly read,
And a gray brother brought a draught of wine,
And pressed it on her. Then the good man
said,
“No mother by the hand leads here her son,
Unless some pious deed is to be done.

“Speak freely.” And she spake with forth-
right tongue:

“The Lord, out of His mercy, lent to me
One talent—this child. While his heart is
young,

And tender as th’ unrazored cheek you see,
I would present him as a gift to God.
Above his head stretch out the holy rod

"Of discipline while he is teachable;
And, with thy prayers, and mine, and by
God's grace,
He shall increase in good like Samuel,
And in this holy house shall keep his place,
(Where the gray brothers with the flesh contend),
Serving Christ faithfully unto the end."—

"The Hebrew mother's alms, though almost
none,
Christ counted precious," quoth the abbot
old;
"But for thy offering, this, thine only son,
It weighs down Melchior's votive myrrh and
gold.

Give me the stripling. God do so to me,
If in mine office I fail Him or thee!"

And so she left him. But at every pace,
As she clomb homewards up the Alpine
height,
She turned to look, with tears upon her face,
Back where the abbey in the fading light
Gloomed like a prison; for the walls of stone
Closed round the only thing she called her own.

But high above on the eternal snow

There lay the sun's last splendor: golden fire,
And richer crimson than blown roses show,

And each keen peak was like a minster-spire
On which Christ's shining cross was set, to
prove

How sorrow may be glorified through love.—

The Lord was with the stripling, and he drunk

At wells of learning,—such as mote be found
In the black-letter folios of the monk;

And, as was meet, a noble mind was crowned
With what in Doctors men delight to see,—
Wisdom, with virtue and humility.

God, too, had made him like the warbling bird,

And hid the pearl of music in his throat;
And in the stately service he was heard

Sustaining ever the liturgic note
(Behind the choir-screen, carven curiously,
With voice like to a woman's, pure and high.

But fasting, prayer, and penance, vigils long,

Hours at the parchment by his lone rush-
light,

Thin garb in winter, and too much of song

In the chill chapel both by day and night,—
Out of this round of labor there came death,
And the cowed paragon sighed out his breath:

Ceased like a silver taper, gnawed upon
By flame to the last film of fragrant wax,
Yet like burnt sandalwood when he was gone,
And not quenched utterly like smoking flax:
Exhaling evermore a sweet perfume,
Like grains of musk dropped in a close-shut
room.

The mother buried him she loved so much,
And with that sepulture heaven lost its blue,
For the dead fingers at her heart did clutch;
And every day—'twas all her love could do—
She plucked the pure, cold flowers of Alpine
bloom,
And laid a garland on her scholar's tomb.

Her poor old eyes were drowned in bitter dew,
And there was such an aching in her breast
That the days seemed as ages. When she
threw

Her fevered body down, 'twas not to rest,
But to stare at the darkness with wide eyes,
And chide the morning-star which would not
rise;

Only to sigh again for day's surcease,
And the repose that came not.—But one
night,
When every air was hushed, and all was peace,
And the large stars looked down with eyes
of light
On the tranced pine-trees which, with branches
vast,
Fenced her thatched cottage from the moun-
tain blast,

She fell asleep just long enough to see
A comforting vision. Good Saint Maurice
came,
With monkish habit, rood, and belt, and key,—
The long-ago-dead worthy, whose great
name
Illustrated the ancient pile of stone
Which rose below by the blue-rushing Rhone.

The good man, all ways just the same as when
He wore the flesh,—the same benignant face,
Which beamed compassion upon sinful men,
The same persuasive voice and words of
grace,—
Sought to console her. But she answered,
“Nay,
My heart is broken: I shall weep away.”

"But," quoth the abbot, for indeed 'twas he,

" 'Tis sinful wilfulness to weep for one
Who hath not died, but tastes felicity

In the saint's fellowship with God the Son.
Gontran is with us, and doth aye behold
The New Jerusalem whose streets are gold.

"And now, that thou may'st know whereof I
speak,

(That thy son truly lives, and is not dead,)
And that thy faith may be no longer weak,

Rise up at sound of matins from thy bed;
Go down the pathway, pass the chapel-door,
And kneel as thou wert wont upon the floor.

"And even as thou kneelest thou shalt hear
The voice of Gontran: yea, that selfsame
voice,

Singing amid the monks both sweet and clear.
Thine ear shall know it, and thou shalt re-
joice.

Whether or no the singer thou dost see,
Thy mother's heart shall teach thee it is he.

“And not for this morn only. Every day
Whilst thou art tabernacled in the flesh,
Thou still shalt hear him. Put thy grief away.
Rise up betimes, while morn is dewy fresh,
And hasten churchwards when the first notes
swell,—
The matin-summons of the cloister-bell.”

She waked, and listened. And when morn was
gray,
The mellow bell-notes floated up the hill;
And she arose, went down the craggy way,
Entered the church, and knelt there statue-
still.
And when the organ's golden pipes had moaned,
And the response had duly been intoned

By the precentor, and the numerous choir
Of tonsured monks, with voices in accord,
Took up the swelling anthem,—like a fire
A voice soared upward, singing, “Praise the
Lord,
Praise Him and magnify Him, frost, and snow,
Ye showers and dew, ye stormy winds that
blow!”¹

¹ See the canticle, “Benedicite omnia opera Domini.”

And with the first clear note the mother knew
That 'twas Monk Gontran in his pointed
hood,

Raising his voice as he was wont to do:

A wondrous voice,—as if some seraph stood
Far out upon a star and sang alone,
With a celestial passion all his own:

The very voice she was so proud to hear

In happier days, but more divinely sweet:
Like a gold-throated bugle, fine and clear.

And the bent mother's blessing seemed complete,

Or almost so, for, in his frock and hood,
She deemed she saw the singer where he stood.

And as Saint Maurice promised, every day

She heard the voice, and saw and knew her
son;

And in the Holy Week at *tenebrae*,

When the great altar's lights died one by
one,

Where the monk stood she saw a fleecy light,
Such as the Milken Way bewrays at night:

Saw him at service-time glide softly in

With the pale brothers of the rosary,
And marked him melt away, a spirit thin,

With a last look of love and sympathy,
As though he said, "Forget thy tears and pain:
'Tis but a night's watch till I come again."

And that it was no mere ecstatic dream,
('Tis Gregory of Tours who tells the tale,)
No apparition that did merely seem,
But a veracious lifting of the veil
By spiritual perfection, which looks through
Decay's gross vesture, and hath clearest view

Of supersensuous realities,
Is proven thuswise:—When the pious dame,
Palsied with age, and racked with miseries,
No longer to the abbey-chapel came,
The spectral monk dissolved, and none mote
hear
The voice that sang so angel-like and clear.

But when, obeying Abbot John's commands,
Down the steep path with painful steps and
slow,
The peasants gently chaired her on their hands
To hear a last mass in the church below,
The monk came, as the spirit of the rose
Steals through a lattice when the west-wind
blows;

And after the response, when the full choir
Took up the anthem, from a phantom throat
A voice rose heavenward like a climbing fire,
With melody seraphic in each note;
And the bent mother, with joy-lighted face,
Beheld her Gontran singing in his place.

I have been busy with the creeds of men:
And sometimes it seemed hard to deem that
any
Was more than the vain scribbling of the pen,
Which lends its ink to speculations many:
Ascribing, too, to Heaven what we know
To be as earthy as the weeds that grow,

And quite as paltry. But at last my heart
Finds shelter in the thought that there is
One
Who is authentic and a God apart,
Though well-nigh visible as is the sun;
And I can sympathize with minds that see
Extended favors of the Deity

In their own persons.—Happy they whose trust
Is sweetly simple,—strong, even though they
err:
Who see plain proofs of life beyond the dust,
And deal in visions such as came to her,
That Merovingian mother, whose great woe
Became her consolation, long ago.

For if Religion be an empty thing,
It is the parent of such tender dreams
As no austere philosophy can bring;
And it is better (so to me it seems)
To be a dreamer, with a life all good,
Than to accept Negation's servitude.

O sweet, pale lilies, that with chaste perfume
Fill the cool chapel on the Easter morn,
When your white triumph o'er the Syrian tomb
Pardons the hyssop and the crown of thorn,
My stubborn heart relents, and quiet tears
Wash out the doubts that marred my willful
years.

The Gothic walls, the altar with its fair
White linen, the rose-window's twilight
stains;
The august canticle, the seemingly prayer,
And Mark and John upon the painted
panes,—
The vapid world, which I so feared to miss,
Is shrunk into a picture such as this.

Calm haven after tempest, safe retreat,
Waters of cleansing after grievous stains!
For bread of tribulation, I may eat
Manna, and, for earth's buffets and disdains,
Hear the Consoler, Who bids sorrow cease!
How could I doubt that here alone was peace?

VALSE DE LA MORT

A FRENCH ARMY EPISODE

AN hour of life, and then to die,
Under the star-besprinkled sky.—
The captain told him he would better
Make him the bearer of his letter,
Or anything he cared to say,
And added, in a kindly way,—
“ If you desire, I’ll call a priest.
There’s time enough for that, at least.”

Now, the country is Algiers,
The time is night, and to their ears,
(From where the litten windows glow
And troops of dancers come and go,)
Swept by the momentary breeze,
There come voluptuous melodies,—
Blown from the palace, close at hand,
Before whose pile the date-palms stand,
The dreaming palms, which rise so high,
And look so black against the sky.

The Prisoner Makes a Request

"Captain, I've one request,
Just one, before I die.
Before you pack me 'off for Brest,'
I'd like a waltz. As for the rest,
There's nothing worth a sigh.
That lady yonder with the flower,
I'm sure, would give me half-an-hour."

The Governor Grants the Request

"The prisoner's shot at twelve, you say?
Well, I suppose it's legal slaughter.
Let the poor devil have his way.
There, Moseer Captain, is my daughter,
The prettiest dancer in the land.
I'm sure she won't refuse her hand."

In the Ball Room

And now the music swells,—such strains as
move
Lips to red onset in the lists of love:
Away they go, of all the dancers there
The most enchanting and enchanted pair.
And later, when the music dies,
They see her looking in his eyes,
And more observing people note
A white rose pinned upon his coat.

But just as he's about to say
Things sweeter than the breath of May,
The Captain, punctual to a dot,
Bows, and invites him to be shot:
"A thousand pardons,—but, Moseer,
A word into your secret ear."

Before the Firing-Squad

Again the palms, the dreamy night,
The palace-windows gleaming bright.
"Captain, I'd like to die
With an unshrouded eye.
If you'll oblige me, just retire.
I'll give the word myself: 'Aim. Fire.'"

The milk-white rose is splashed with red:
The flutes respire, the viols sigh,
And there, the casement gliding by,
Is that same darkly flashing eye,—
I wonder if she knows he's dead?

"M'SIEU L'ABBE"

IN sun-steeped, vineyard-set Burgundy
There dwelt a little priest,
Who said high mass once every Sunday,
And twice on Stephen's feast.—
M'sieu l'Abbe, known through all the valleys,
Did all a priest should do:
Adored red wine inside a chalice,
And liked it outside, too.

Good sooth, he dignified his orders,
Though not a man of ice,
Kept close within the church's borders,
Scotched sin, and blistered vice.
To cries of grief and sinners' sighing
His ears were never dumb,
And day and night he gave the dying
Holy *Viaticum*.

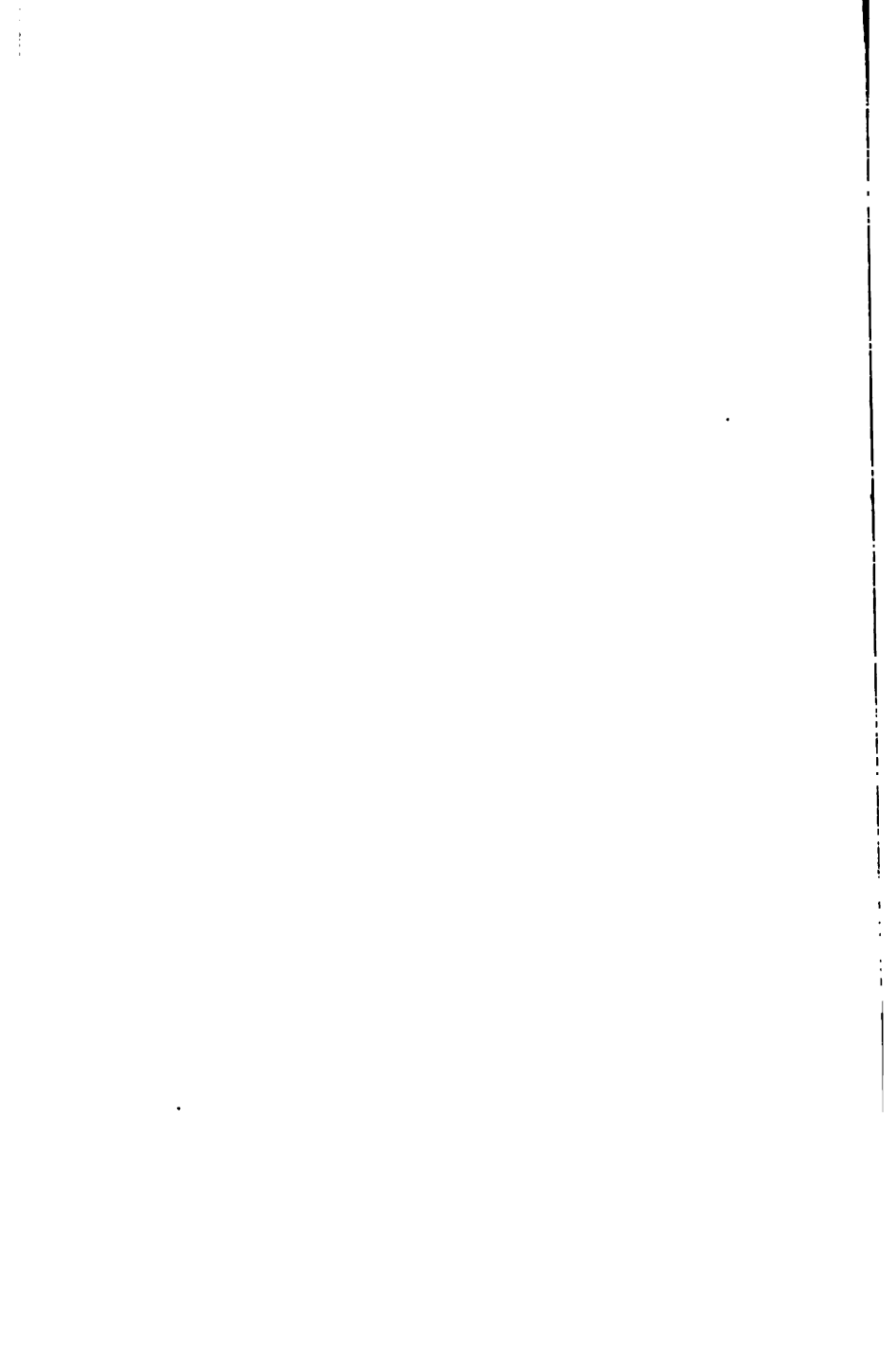
M'sieu l'Abbe owned a wine-tun oaken,
That warped out in the sun.
Were it not good, no word being spoken,
To fill with wine that tun?
At night, why should not every peasant
His quart pot put to use,
And fill the butt up with a present
Of good Burgundy-juice?

'Twas done. Next day, in gay profusion,
Hop-vine and poppy-flower
Transformed the wine-butt (brief illusion)
Into a Bacchic bower.
"Vive, vive M'sieu l'Abbe,"—so they shouted,
Each mouth agape with glee.
Speeches were made, and verses spouted,
And all went merrily.

But when the red stream should have spurted
To cheer the thirsty throng,
'Twas Cana's marriage-feast inverted,
The miracle gone wrong;
For when the spokesman, strutting finely,
Stepped up to turn the spout,
His face grew red, he swore divinely—
Pure water squirted out.

Oh, friendship, charity, devotion:
Oh, prelate, crushed with woe!
One quart of water to an ocean
Of claret,—who would know?
No one, of course, had not the Devil,
Who loves to spoil a feast,
Given every clown that thought of evil,
To scandalize a priest.

Tradition says the little prelate,
On Alexander's plan,
Got drunk for spite, but I don't tell it
To shame the holy man.
If he got boozy, I forgive him,
And will not see the stain.
For *that* slip may Saint Peter shrive him
From purgatorial pain.



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